SCANDALS PREVALENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS 7 | FRIEDMAN REPORT - CHOICE ROUNDUP 10-11 | JOHN KIRTLEY INTERVIEW 14-15

School Reform News

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Audit Charges $100 Million Fraud in Miami-Dade Schools

by Lisa Snell

Corruption and mismanagement have cost taxpayers more than $100 million, according to a forensic audit of the Miami-Dade County (Florida) School Board conducted at the request of a state oversight board.

Independent auditors from Lewis B. Freeman & Partners, who produced the report, recommended the appointment of a special prosecutor and statewide grand jury to investigate the Miami-Dade school district's multibillion-dollar Facilities Construction Department, alleging massive disorganization and waste as well as "probable malfeasance, misfeasance, and potential for fraud."

District officials dispute the April 28 Forensic Audit Report and argue the auditors provided no evidence to substantiate their claims. The Freeman auditors respond that the district has refused to cooperate and has not provided a complete

AUDIT p. 6

Edison Reports Strong Achievement Gains

Getty

Students walk by the Mariana Bracetti Academy Charter School after a free period in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school is managed by Edison Schools, Inc.

by Krista Kafer

Students in Edison-run schools are making significant academic progress and parents are very satisfied with the schools, according to the privately held company's latest annual performance report, released in April.

The report indicates the for-profit firm's approach to learning is beginning to bridge the racial achievement gap and help schools

EDISON p. 4

NCLB Choice Boosts Learning in Chicago

by Krista Kafer

A groundbreaking analysis by the Chicago Board of Education, conducted at the request of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, found Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students who transferred to new schools under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) improved their academic performance.

Under NCLB, students at schools that do not meet state standards in reading and math for two consecutive years may transfer to better-performing schools.

Arne Duncan

The study, which tracked students using Iowa Tests of Basic Skills scores, also found that transferring students did not adversely impact the academic achievement in "receiving" schools, which continued to progress.

Chicago Schools Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan told the *Sun-Times*, "It's a win-win-win. I couldn't have asked for better results."

The study tracked students who transferred in Fall 2002 and their peers in both "sending" and "receiving" schools. Of the 120,000 students eligible to transfer in 2002, only 26,000 were allowed to

NCLB p. 8

Who Will Read Newspapers?

Literacy and interest continue to wane

by Robert Holland

As the Education Writers Association's awards demonstrate, newspaper reporters continue to produce thought-provoking and substantive stories. However, recent reports raise concerns as to whether newspapers will continue to have readers in tomorrow's America.

A major worry is whether public schools are preparing children to read well enough that they will want to read for pleasure as well as information when they become adults. Only about a third of the nation's public schoolchildren read proficiently, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. While reading achievement levels have increased slightly among fourth-graders, they have been declining among high school seniors.

A 500-page report, "The State of the News Media 2004," recently published by

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CAPITOL HILL BEAT
"Senator Specter said he was on our side, but when the time came to vote for us, he betrayed us and voted against us."
VIRGINIA WALDEN FORD

Roll Call

Congressmen Honored for Supporting School Choice

by Don Soifer

An April 21 inaugural event by the Educational Freedom Caucus and Coalition gave District of Columbia parents and leaders an opportunity to thank in person Members who had supported the DC voucher vote. Longtime school choice champion Clint Bolick was on hand to lend his perspective to the occasion and to discuss the formation of his new Phoenix-based choice organization, The School Choice Alliance. Also on hand was Vanessa DeCarbo, communications director for the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, with a delegation of leaders and parents from Hispanic CREO to discuss their work promoting choice and parental options around the country.

Educational Freedom Caucus founders Pete Hoekstra (R-Michigan) and Trent Franks (R-Arizona) led a group of 10 Congressmen who received awards for their leadership on behalf of DC choice. Other Members receiving awards were House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio) and Representatives Tom Feeney (R-Florida), Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-New Jersey), DeMint, John Kline (R-Minnesota), Tom Petri (R-Wisconsin), Ed Schrock (R-Virginia), and Dave Weldon (R-Florida).

Federal Tax Credit Bill Introduced

Representative Jim DeMint (R-South Carolina) introduced his National Education Advancement and Teacher Relief Act. The plan offers a 75 percent tax credit for teachers to offset classroom expenses they may incur, as well as a $500 individual tax credit for donations to schools or scholarship organizations ($1,000 for families). Corporations would also be eligible for credits of up to $100,000 for the same purpose.

DeMint was joined by Representatives Gresham Barrett (R-South Carolina), Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colorado), and Pete Hoekstra as original cosponsors of the plan.

Choice An Issue in Pennsylvania Race

Incumbent Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania)—who voted against the DC voucher program—nearly lost his April 27 primary battle against Pat Toomey, a Congressman who has distinguished himself as a school choice advocate. With more than 1 million votes cast, Specter beat Toomey by a mere 12,600 votes.

Choice advocate Virginia Walden Ford, president of DC Parents for School Choice, drew a clear distinction between the two at a March event in Philadelphia.

"Educational Freedom Caucus founders Pete Hoekstra (R-Michigan) and Trent Franks (R-Arizona) led a group of 10 Congressmen who received awards [on April 21] for their leadership on behalf of DC choice."

"Senator Specter said he was on our side, but when the time came to vote for us, he betrayed us and voted against us," said Walden Ford, describing the year's biggest Congressional school choice vote. "Congressman Toomey has been a fighter for us down in D.C. and he'll be a fighter for the children and parents of Pennsylvania as well."

Specter won the primary by a two-point margin and will face Democratic Representative Joe Hoeffel in November. President George W. Bush supported the 74-year old incumbent, whose opposition to several Bush administration priorities rankled many conservatives.

Mayor Williams Loses School Control Vote

Washington, DC Mayor Anthony A. Williams earned a national reputation as an education reformer for his unwavering support of a historic voucher program for the nation's capital. But the mayor's subsequent bid to take control of the District's public school system was thwarted when the D.C. City Council rejected the plan in April.

By a vote of 9 to 4, the council vetoed a measure that would have given the mayor power to hire and fire the school superintendent and relegated the Board of Education to an advisory capacity.

The council then took the additional step of voting to return the school board to an all-elected body in 2006, which would then eliminate the mayor's four appointees to the Board of Education. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Councilman Jack Evans (D-Georgetown), who had supported the mayor's plan, said schools "are probably the most emotional issue" in the District and a change in governance gets closer each year.

"On the council there is still not a majority of people who are willing to take a controversial position that would involve this dramatic change in the governing structure," he said.

Williams' decision to support the DC voucher program was instrumental in its passage, and leaders working to get the DC voucher program up and running before the 2004-2005 school year have had only positive things to say about the role he and his staff have played in helping to make that happen.

Don Soifer is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute. His email address is **soifer@lexingtoninstitute.org**.

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Edison

Continued from page 1

meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Edison Schools is the nation's largest private provider of public education. The company manages 130 charter and traditional public schools, provides after-school programs, and conducts management consultation and teacher training. In all, the company serves more than 132,000 public school students in 20 states.

The new report, "The Sixth Annual Report on School Performance," compares 2002 and 2003 state test scores. Average achievement gains show the majority of Edison Schools—82 percent—are raising student achievement. Edison students gained an average of 6.7 percentage points compared to an average gain of only 3.6 percentage points in comparable non-Edison schools.

Edison's chief education officer, John Chubb, who authored the report, credited the gains to the growth and maturity of the company, and also to the effect of maturing support measures.

"In the first year a school is managed by Edison it often undergoes a shift in educational culture," he explained. "It is in the next years that real change and achievement can occur."

Edison Schools also were more successful than comparable non-Edison schools in reducing the failure rate on state criterion-referenced tests. Edison Schools reduced the rate by 5 percentage points, a rate that is three and five times higher than that of their home districts and states.

In schools designated as "needs improvement" under NCLB, Edison improved student achievement by 5.5 percentage points. That improvement exceeded the gains posted by schools' home districts and states, which posted gains of 3.5 and 1.9 percentage points respectively.

Edison Schools also posted strong gains in schools serving predominantly black students. At schools with a population at least 90 percent African-American, the average one-year gain was 7.2 percentage points and the average two-year gain was 9.5 percentage points. These gains are similar to the rates of gain across all Edison schools.

"The strong and compelling gains that these Edison students have posted suggest that quality schooling can make a meaningful difference for students from any background," said Chubb.

"The comparable schools analysis provides a powerful answer to the question of how well Edison partnership schools perform in comparison to similar schools in the districts that we work," added Chubb. "That answer is clear: Edison schools' achievement gains consistently exceed those gains at similar schools in the locales where we are working."

"Edison schools' achievement gains consistently exceed those gains at similar schools in the locales where we are working."

JOHN CHUBB

Parental satisfaction in Edison Schools remains strong for the eighth year. According to an independent survey, 85 percent of parents whose children attend Edison Schools rated their schools an A or B. Fifty-one percent gave their school an A.

Teacher satisfaction also is strong in Edison schools. Eighty-seven percent of Edison School teachers gave their career satisfaction levels top grades.

The annual performance report does not include schools that opened in 2002-2003 since there was insufficient data to create a valid trend line. The RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research organization, has confirmed the achievement data as consistent with scores tabulated by the state and test publishers. RAND has been monitoring Edison Schools since 2000 and will issue a final report on student achievement outcomes from 2000-2004 in August.

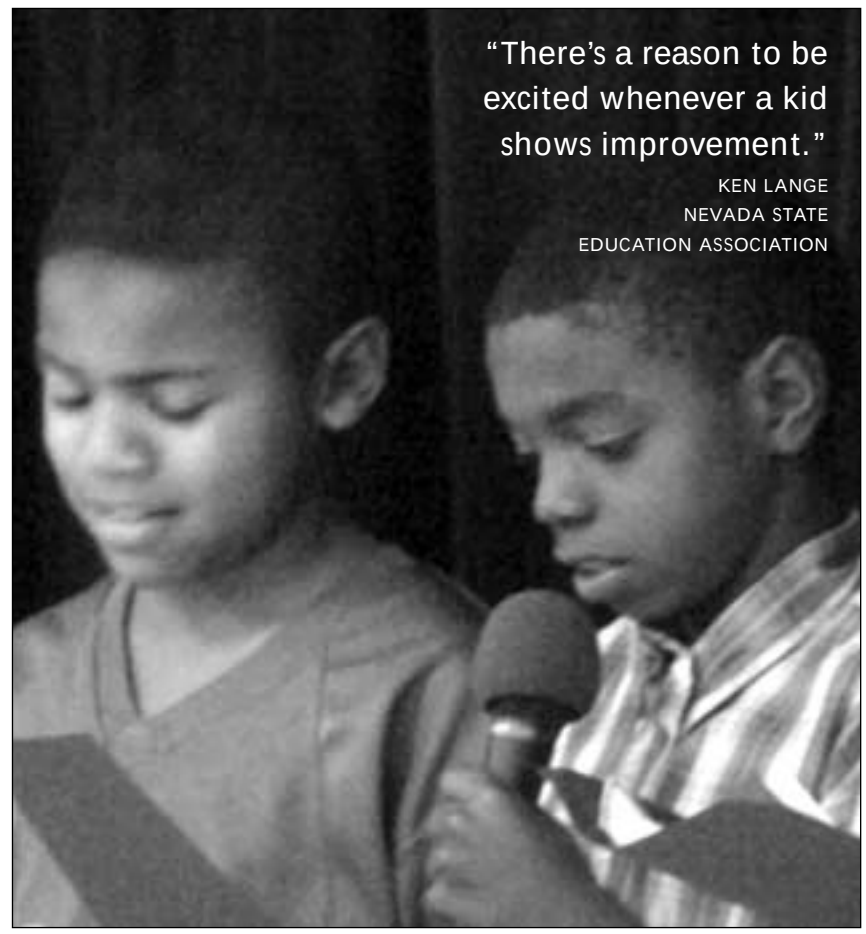
Krista Kafer is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation. Her email address is **krista.kafer@heritage.org**.

INTERNET INFO

The April 2004 report from Edison Schools, "The Sixth Annual Report on School Performance," is available online at **http://www.edisonschools.com/sixthannualreport.pdf**.

A summary is available at **http://www.edisonschools.com/design/d23.html**.

Strong Scores Raise Edison's Prospects



Although the measure was vigorously opposed by the state teacher union, in April 2001 the Clark County School Board in Las Vegas, Nevada unanimously agreed to have Edison Schools take over seven of the district's underperforming schools for five years at a cost of about $8 million a year. A subsequent teacher union lawsuit to overturn the board's decision resulted in a settlement whereby the board agreed to form committees to evaluate Edison's performance and make a recommendation to terminate, extend, or expand the firm's contract.

When test scores were announced in February for the schools Edison manages, even the top teacher union official sounded impressed and encouraged by the strong results. At the elementary level, scores in reading, language, and science at the Edison schools were virtually the same as the district's comparison group. However, scores in math showed the Edison students had improved more and performed better than their peers in district schools.

"There's a reason to be excited whenever a kid shows improvement," Ken Lange, executive director of the Nevada State Education Association, told the *Las Vegas Sun*. "Obviously the folks in those schools and the students are working very hard, and there's been a conscious focus on mathematics as a challenge area."

Lange suggested it may take another year of test scores before Edison's overall performance can be evaluated, telling the *Las Vegas Sun*, "We need to give [Edison] a little more time."

Contracts Extended in Peoria and Davenport

After seeing the impressive academic gains achieved in Edison-run schools in their districts over the past five years, school boards in Peoria, Illinois and Davenport, Iowa both voted in April to extend the partnership contracts for another five years.

In Peoria, the nearly 2,000 students at the four Edison-run schools have shown substantial gains on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test, with one school—Franklin-Edison Primary School—ranked among the highest-gaining schools in the entire state.

"When test scores were announced in February for the schools Edison manages [in Las Vegas], even the top teacher union official sounded impressed and encouraged by the strong results."

"The partnership will benefit the district, Edison, and most of all Peoria's students and parents," said Vince Wieland, president of the Peoria Board of Education. "I look forward to another great five years."

In Davenport, the academic gains made by the 478 students at Jefferson-Edison Elementary over the past five years have contributed to overwhelming parental support, with 94 percent of Jefferson-Edison parents giving the school an A or B grade.

"When visiting the building, you can see that wonderful things are happening at the school," said Susan Low, board president of Davenport Community Schools.

"This public/private partnership reveals what can happen when Edison and school districts work together to achieve a common goal," added Chris Cerf, president and chief operating officer of Edison Schools.

— *G.C.*

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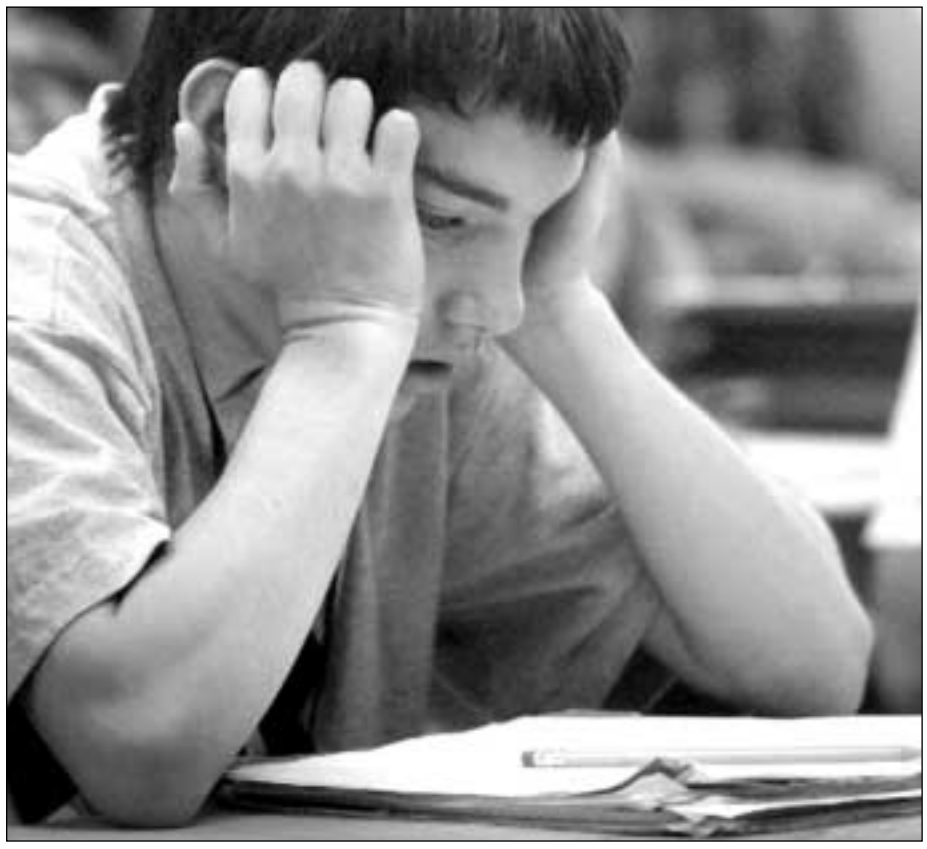
Cut and Run:
California Retreats on Math



by Lance T. Izumi

The controversy over American jobs going overseas has so far largely overlooked a key factor: poor-quality American education. American companies, faced with a domestic labor pool deficient in even basic knowledge and skills, are financing the math and science education of students in foreign countries. Yet, despite the implications of this trend, California has reduced the difficulty of math requirements for students.

Across communist China, computer software colleges are being built at 35 universities. At Peking University's School of Software, which opened in 2002, Chinese students take advantage of state-of-the-art labs funded by IBM, Sun Microsystems, Motorola, Oracle, and other American high-tech giants. So far, the American firms have provided $2 million in grants, donations, and equipment to the school.

U.S. companies want well-educated foreign students to staff their overseas operations, and the new software colleges in China base their curriculum on the needs of American industry. Within three years, the software college at Peking University will have 3,800 students specializing in subjects such as integrated-circuit design and information security. Much of the instruction will be in English.

In China, 58 percent of the degrees awarded in 2002 were in the physical sciences and engineering, compared to just 17 percent in the U.S. China awarded 220,000 engineering bachelor's degrees versus 60,000 awarded by U.S. universities. The *San Jose Mercury News* reported, "With the benefits of massive foreign investment and training, a booming economy, and a national mandate, China is poised to surge ahead—and perhaps to one day rival American leadership in technology."

How is California, home of Silicon Valley, meeting this foreign challenge?

The latest trend has been for school districts to plead with the state to waive the algebra requirement for high school seniors to graduate this year. Judy Pinegar, manager of waivers at the state Department of Education, says the number of districts asking the state for waivers "is increasing algebraically" and that the department is "getting tons of calls." State lawmakers will likely introduce legislation to postpone the algebra requirement for at least one year.

The state's retreat on algebra comes on top of its decision to reduce the difficulty of the math portion of the high school exit exam, which students in the class of 2006 have to pass in order to graduate. Students no longer have to calculate the lower quartile, median, and maximum of a data set. Instead, the number of questions asking students to calculate averages, a sixth-grade skill, increased.

After taking the exam, Bharath Venkat, a 16-year-old Modesto high schooler, said the test "was middle school stuff." Venkat sharply observed: "I thought it was going to be harder. I thought it would be based on junior or senior year stuff. It is the high school exit exam."

While the test is easier, students still need to get only 55 percent of the math questions right in order to pass.

Lance T. Izumi is director of education studies and senior fellow in California studies at the Pacific Research Institute. His email address is **lizumi@pacificresearch.org**.

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Letters may be edited for length.

NBPTS Certification Redundant to Value-Added

Re: "New Study First to Affirm Value of National Teacher Certification," by Robert Holland, *School Reform News*, May 2004.

There were many more non-NBPTS certified teachers who performed as well as, or better than, the NBPTS certified teachers, but who received no salary increments for their performance. This is apparently the first time that both the National Education Association and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards have, albeit implicitly, endorsed incremental value added, measured by incremental student performance, as a measure of teaching effectiveness.

If one accepts incremental student performance as the measure of teaching effectiveness, why bother with the imperfect surrogate, NBPTS certification, when the real thing is available at far less cost?

John T. Wenders
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Teacher Agrees: National Teacher Certification IS a hoax

Re: "National Teacher Certification Labeled a 'Hoax'," by George A. Clowes, *School Reform News*, April 2004.

Thank you so much for reporting on the hoax of National Teacher Certification (NTC). The public needs to know about this hoax and teachers need to know about the inconsistencies in the award process. I went through this experience several years ago when it very first became available to North Carolina teachers. This IS truly a hoax!

I have my Masters in Education and am a certified reading teacher. My students consistently scored the highest scores and made the greatest gains on end-of-grade testing in reading, yet I did not pass the reading section of the test. My highest NTC score was a section on 8th grade health, which I have never even taught.

In working with other teachers who were also trying to become certified, I saw teachers lie about their classroom activities and falsify reports. Some of these teachers kept children after school to do mock lessons and then rewarded them with ice-cream parties. There would be no way for assessors to check this.

I worked with a teacher of gifted children who knew nothing about teaching reading or how to help a struggling emergent reader. This teacher passed the reading section and became certified. I helped edit and gave suggestions to the submissions of two other teachers who also got the certification. These teachers did not have near the experience I had, nor have any type of higher degree.

The NTC computerized assessment I took seemed entirely subjective. Who really knows who the assessors were and what the true "standards" were? I footnoted my answers with current research, especially by Nancy Atwell, yet this seemed not to matter. Also, I witnessed lots of mail sent out by NTC trying to get teachers to help do the assessments, so I seriously question the qualifications of the assessors. Are they simply people looking for extra cash?

During the process, the phone "assistance" from NTC was pathetic. I would call in for answers to my questions and get inconsistent responses. I was told that my Masters degree would count toward evidence of Professional Development but even though I listed it, plus all the other committees I have worked on, I did not pass that section either.

I learned nothing through this certification experience except that it was an unfair and subjective process. Teachers who received the NTC recognition in my community were not always thought of as good teachers by the rest of the community. The entire assessment was a complete waste of a year in my life.

I feel very strongly about all the promotion for this false honor, plus the wasted tax dollars for very little achievement. Surely we can find a better way to spend this vast amount of money and meet our students' educational needs.

5th-Grade Science Teacher
North Carolina
(Name withheld at writer's request)

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Audit

Continued from page 1

set of records that document how and where construction funds were distributed. The auditors found the district's reporting systems could not even provide definitive answers to such basic questions as "How many schools do you have?" and "How many students do you have?"

Report Charges Mismanagement, Fraud

The initial report from Freeman & Partners found many indications of severe mismanagement and fraud:

■ "The District failed to monitor a myriad of warranties, or even perform rudimentary preventative maintenance resulting in warranties being voided or allowing them to lapse, causing enormous fiscal waste and costly litigation."

■ "There are a number of curious documentary links that demonstrate a possible common interest showing that the lease-purchase site acquisition methods provide a profit bonanza to the underlying fee owner (until all facts are verified and further probed, it would be inappropriate to name parties involved at this time)."

■ "Pandemic malfeasance and misfeasance and potential fraud that appears to have begun before the 1988, $980 million capital bond's largess, continues largely unabated, despite numerous external investigations and reports and cries for reform."

■ "We have so far identified a number of District employees, six, whose actions/inactions appear to rise/fall to an unacceptable level, possibly to the level of malfeasance/misfeasance in office (additional, in-depth investigation is required before confirming these initial impressions)."

■ "Capital funds appear to be rolled over year-to-year and appear to be frequently used for non-capital purposes, causing significant cost overruns, delays and ultimately, deficits and inaccurate reporting."

■ "District staff pawn off critical inspection to incompetent or negligent third-parties, which produces lingering District-wide student life-safety code violations despite the ability of other government inspectors to perform these functions."

■ "Politics dictate awarding contracts to small local contractors who appear to be ill-equipped to undertake and complete the work."

■ "Initial impressions include a sense of improper expenditures and Board member self-dealing with little or no monitoring of employee hiring to match positions."

■ "Several projects lingered for years on the District's five year work plan until they mysteriously vanish from new plans."

■ "In all our prior experience, we have never seen such complete lack of organization, communication, professionalism and waste. For a publicly funded organization charged to construct and maintain facilities for our future generations, the probable malfeasance, misfeasance and potential for fraud have led to continued overcrowding of schools and the perpetuation of unsafe schools, including real probabilities for financial fraud and possible loss of life through the lack of attention to rampant life-safety code violations."

INTERNET INFO

The April 28, 2004 report by Lewis B. Freeman & Partners, Inc., "Forensic Report prepared for Miami-Dade School District Land Advisory and Facilities Maintenance Operations Board," is available online at **http://town.surfside.fl.us/schools_forensic-audit_04-28-04.html**.

Former Surfside Mayor Paul Novack describes problems with Miami-Dade public school construction and maintenance in an April 2003 *School Reform News* interview, "A Merry-Go-Round of Irresponsibility," **http://www.heartland.org/ArticleProcessor.cfm?theId=artId11784**.

See also the October 2000 *School Reform News* article, "Children Forced to Attend Dangerous Schools," **http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=10895**.

Further information on safety and construction issues in the Miami-Dade school district is available at the Town of Surfside's Web site at **http://www.town.surfside.fl.us/schools_construction.html**.

The *Miami Herald*'s "Crumbling Schools, Crowded Classrooms" series is available online at **http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/living/education/5174472.htm**.

Grand Jury Recommended

The auditors recommend the State of Florida assign a state-level grand jury and appoint a special prosecutor to organize a new investigation with an Independent Private Sector Inspector General (IPSIG) to fully and completely review and investigate the Facilities Construction Department. The goal of the special prosecutor and the IPSIG, according to the audit report, would be to investigate and prosecute individuals and/or entities responsible for the "obvious fraud and malfeasance" that has resulted in the wasting of millions of public dollars.

The report also calls for the state to take immediate control of the Miami-Dade facilities program.

"The oversight board (M-DAB) should petition the State to immediately take over planning, construction, renovations and capital maintenance of all educational facilities currently overseen by the Miami-Dade County School District," the Freeman auditors write.

The oversight panel for the district's construction programs—the Miami-Dade School District Land Advisory and Facilities Maintenance Operations Board—was appointed by the State of Florida in 2001, following revelations by then-Surfside Mayor Paul Novack of severe fire safety hazards in district schools that had been reported for years but remained uncorrected. The school board at first ignored Novack's findings, then denied there were any problems, and subsequently attempted to conceal their seriousness. (See "Children Forced to Attend Dangerous Schools," *School Reform News*, October 2000.)

The Miami-Dade district's maintenance operations last year were the subject of an award-winning series of articles on "Crumbling Schools, Crowded Classrooms" in the *Miami Herald*. In addition, reporter Jilda Unruh and "The Investigators" of Miami's Channel 10 News have over several years unearthed unflattering examples of excessive payments by the district for land acquisition and development. (See "A Merry-Go-Round of Irresponsibility," *School Reform News*, April 2003.)

The district and school board have demanded proof of the allegations from the Freeman auditors, apparently unaware that Florida newspapers during the past year have created a climate of expectation in the state that organizations receiving public dollars must be able to show those dollars are being spent for their intended public purpose. For example, the State of Florida recently demanded that nonprofit organizations providing private tax credit scholarships must show proof of how they are spending the charitable contributions and where private scholarships are going.

"Pandemic malfeasance and misfeasance and potential fraud that appears to have begun before the 1988, $980 million capital bond's largess, continues largely unabated, despite numerous external investigations and reports and cries for reform."

LEWIS B. FREEMAN & PARTNERS

A similar demand would force the Miami-Dade school district to provide adequate records that document how school construction dollars have been spent over the past decade. That may not be possible because of the district's mismanagement, according to the *Miami Herald*.

"The broader concern raised by the auditors is that proof of fraud or corruption may be impossible to pluck from the construction department's morass of mismanagement, which is mired in chaotic accounting, lost and misfiled paperwork and isolated, incompetent employees," noted the newspaper.

The district currently has more than $1 billion in pending construction projects.

Lisa Snell is director of the education program for the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Her email address is **lsnell@reason.org**.

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Scandals Prevalent in Public Schools

by Lisa Snell

Recent cases in Milwaukee and Florida involving the misuse of funds have raised questions about how accountable school choice programs are for their use of public tax dollars and charitable donations. Media accounts of these isolated incidents imply that fraud and fiscal mismanagement are somehow a byproduct of the private sector's involvement in school programs. Yet the public school sector has persistently been burdened with ongoing incidents of financial mismanagement and cases of large-scale fraud.

California

In California alone, the legislature has approved millions of dollars in state bailouts for districts that have experienced huge budget shortfalls due to fraud, corruption, and fiscal mismanagement. Last year, Oakland Unified became the most notorious example of such mismanagement after the state took over the district and approved a record $100 million state bailout.

The state is currently investigating whether Oakland officials changed budget numbers to make projections match year-end actuals, artificially inflated enrollment, and illegally shifted money earmarked for specific programs to the general fund, along with funds from a voter-approved construction bond issue. The state review will also investigate allegations that district employees paid as overseas recruiters took kickbacks from teachers they hired in the Philippines and whether money was stolen from funds meant for school cafeterias and student organizations.

Since 1991, it has cost California taxpayers almost $220 million to bail out seven public school districts because of financial mismanagement and fraud:

- $60 million (pending); Vallejo Unified, 2004
- $100 million; Oakland Unified, 2003
- $2 million; West Fresno Elementary, 2003
- $1.3 million; Emery Unified, Emeryville, 2001
- $20 million; Compton Unified, Los Angeles County, 1993
- $7.3 million; Coachella Valley Unified, Riverside County, 1992
- $28.5 million; Richmond Unified (now West Contra Costa Unified), 1991

Despite the assurance that public schools are held accountable for the proper use of taxpayer funds, school administrators who mismanage public funds actually suffer few consequences. As Chris Thompson reported in the *East Bay Express* (Oakland) last year:

"One of the most infuriating problems in public education is the absolute lack of public accountability for system administrators. Berkeley superintendent Jack McLaughlin spent his district $6 million into the hole, and where is he now? He serves as superintendent of education for the state of Nevada.

"J.L. Handy bankrupted the Compton school district, and what happened to him? The Emeryville school board hired him and let him destroy their district as well.

"Walter Marks forced the West Contra Costa district to beg Sacramento for a $29 million bailout and soon thereafter the Kansas City school district hired him as its new superintendent."

And while California might be the most generous state with taxpayer bailouts, public school fraud is not unique to the Golden State. In 2004, newspapers were filled with stories of blatant fraud involving school districts. Some representative examples include:

New York

In New York, the chief financial officer for Roslyn schools, who was forced to retire and make restitution after allegedly embezzling $250,000 from the district, may have stolen as much as $1 million during her four years on the job.

Texas

In the Fort Worth School District, Superintendent Thomas Tocco is still running the district even after a contractor and school district administrator stole $10 million. Tocco learned about problems involving the district's contracting in 2000, after an internal audit showed management hadn't reviewed invoices to make sure they matched up with the work that was done. Tocco and the board president discussed the audit, but the rest of the trustees didn't learn about it for 16 months. In the interim, the contractor, Ray Brooks, won $2 million more business from the district.

Pennsylvania

In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Superintendent Ricardo Curry has resigned and is the subject of federal, state, and local investigations into illegal hiring practices. He paid his unqualified girlfriend, sister, and brother-in-law thousands of dollars in consulting fees for work they often did not even attempt to perform. For example, his girlfriend, Tamara DeShields, was paid $1,500 per day for consulting work in 2001 and 2002 for the Office of Teaching and Learning.

In 2003, the FBI completed an investigation into the Harrisburg School District that was launched when a teacher discovered 1,000 laptop computers purchased with federal grants had never been delivered. The federal government charged the district's former information technology director and the head of a Dauphin County computer firm with running a $1.9 million kickback scheme.

Michigan

In Oakland, Michigan, Superintendent James Redmond was charged with felony embezzlement that included running a nonprofit organization, the Mind's Institute, that benefited from large no-bid contracts with the district.

Several school board members in East Detroit are awaiting trial for their participation in a large school district embezzlement scheme.

E-Rate Fraud

At the federal level, a 2004 report from the General Accounting Office confirmed that the e-rate program, which each year provides schools with $2.5 billion in subsidies for Internet services, has been fraught with fraud and abuse. Federal e-rate administrators and school districts around the nation have failed to monitor their e-rate contracts. Some examples:

Illinois

The Chicago Public schools have more than $5 million in e-rate computer equipment sitting in a warehouse, even though e-rate regulations require the equipment be installed in the same year as the district receives the grant.

California

In San Francisco, school officials discovered a $68 million networking project by a private company would actually cost less than $18 million if done by district technicians.

New York

A New York company was charged with eight counts of federal crimes after the firm bought expensive equipment beyond what the schools could pay for, then created phony invoices for its own reimbursement.

Texas

An $18 million e-rate project in Ysleta was ended after federal auditors discovered the firm contracting with the Ysleta schools had precluded other Internet companies from the bidding process.

Any school, private or public, that is supported by public tax dollars should meet strict financial standards and face serious consequences for fiscal malfeasance. At present, schools in the private sector are quickly reprimanded and often shut down when fiscal improprieties are discovered, but public schools are not. A truly accountable publicly funded school system would require that all public funds be safeguarded with equal vigor.

Lisa Snell is director of the education program for the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Her email address is **lsnell@reason.org**.

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NCLB

Continued from page 1

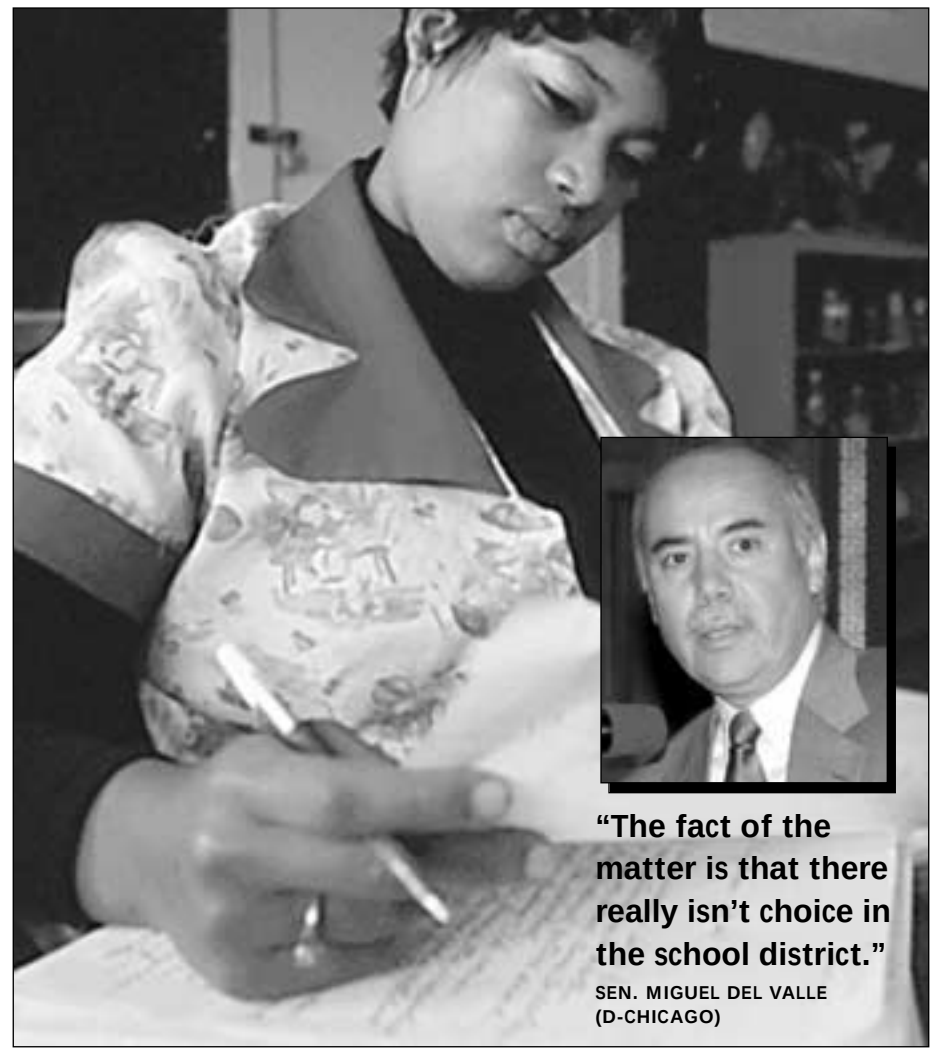
seek 2,500 seats in better schools. Ultimately, only 737 students enrolled in new schools. Last year the district provided even fewer transfer seats—1,100—in 38 higher-performing schools. Seven percent of eligible students applied.

Although some students returned to their old schools, students who remained in the new schools improved in reading and math, achieving 8 percent more than the expected gain in both subjects. While in their "sending" schools, the transfer students had posted 24 percent less than the expected gain in reading and 17 percent less than the expected gain in math.

Although students who remained in their original schools showed some improvement, transfer students had higher gains. Parents told the *Sun-Times* the teachers at the new schools were more challenging and communicated with them more often.

One parent whose 10-year-old son transferred to a new school told the *Sun-Times* she was happy she switched because her son had made a significant turnaround. At his old school he was not engaged, but "Now, he enjoys school," said Tammie Summerville.

Despite the success of the program, CPS will provide only 457 transfer slots this fall—less than half the number made available last fall. The district estimates 82 percent of the city's 602 schools will fail to meet state academic standards. The number of underperforming schools will rise to 493 if all of the 130 schools that failed to meet standards last year do not improve. Some of these schools have appealed their designation.



"The fact of the matter is that there really isn't choice in the school district."
SEN. MIGUEL DEL VALLE (D-CHICAGO)

Of the schools meeting state standards, officials say only 20 have space to receive students. There are no seats available in the district's higher-performing high schools. Only 10 of the district's 90 high schools are performing at state standards, and these are either selective admission schools or are at capacity.

"The fact of the matter is that there really isn't choice in the school district," Sen. Miguel del Valle (D-Chicago) told the *Chicago Tribune*.

Given these constraints, CPS has decided to grant supplemental tutoring to eligible students who will not have the opportunity to transfer. Next year, 20 vendors will be available to tutor students. The district is also making efforts to better inform parents and to give them more time to complete the application process. Parents will have a month to respond to a letter detailing the transfer and tutoring options.

Chicago parent Joei Johnson applied for transfers for her children last year but was denied. Disappointed with the tutoring one of her children received, she told the *Chicago Tribune* she may move out of the area.

"I'm not seeing any fruits of labor with No Child Left Behind," she told the *Tribune*. "We haven't been offered anything basically."

Krista Kafer is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation. Her email address is **krista.kafer@heritage.org**.

INTERNET INFO

Rosalind Rossi's April 25, 2004 *Chicago Sun-Times* article, "Early results on 'No Child': Progress," is available online at **http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-choice25.html**.

Ana Beatriz Cholo's April 23, 2004 *Chicago Tribune* article, "School Reform Pinch: Only 457 spots open for city students to transfer," is available for purchase online at **http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-0404230219apr23,1,2772929.story**.

Freedom of Choice: From *Brown* to School Vouchers

by Gerard Robinson

The U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling created a divide in education policy that centers on the phrase "freedom of choice." The Court's decision overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine and freed the Court from the "burden of its history" of support for segregation. Nonetheless, in resisting *Brown*, many Southern policy-makers identified an important issue that was not explicitly about race: parental choice.

A parent has a constitutional right to decide whether a public or private school is best for her or his child. However, many Southern states abused the rhetoric of "freedom" and "choice" to circumvent integration efforts by using sham "school choice" programs. Those programs involved closing the public schools and providing tuition grants to finance the education of white pupils at all-white private academies.

This "fear-based choice" might have succeeded had it not been for several federal court decisions rendered between 1959 and 1969. In those cases, judges concluded fear-based choice was inconsistent with the Constitution. They also said tuition grants could not serve as a means to circumvent *Brown* or to promote racial discrimination in public or private education. Private school freedom of choice, in the form of direct aid, remained dormant for many years.

That changed in the 1990s as private school choice came into vogue again. But this time it came without racial separatism. The 1990s movement made parental decision-making and academic uplift its two most essential components.

"[U]nlike its counterpart during fear-based choice, America's black community is clearly benefitting from freedom-based choice."

Unlike programs of the fear-based choice era, freedom-based choice sought to remedy the disparities between rich and poor students by providing vouchers to children from low-income families of all races so they could attend better schools. The Supreme Court in 2002 upheld this type of "freedom of choice" in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*.

True, the private school freedom-of-choice movements of the 1950s and 1990s have some similarities. But those similarities pale compared with the ideological differences between them. Still, freedom of choice is debated because anti-voucher groups often lump the movements together to support their thesis that modern school choice is nothing more than a 1950s tuition grant clothed in a corporate suit rather than a white sheet. To these opponents, the only private choice beneficiaries are conservative white (male) elites, and black schoolchildren and their parents are choice victims once again.

Critics treat a 1950s tuition grant and a modern voucher as synonymous. They often misuse the "segregation academy" cliché to generate fear and racial mistrust. For example, Rev. Jesse Jackson has claimed, "The same ideology that supported *Plessy*, opposed *Brown*, and inspired the formation of all-White academies, is now behind the school voucher issue."

Another example was in 1997, when ACLU legislative representative Terri Schroeder recalled the history of fear-based choice to predict that voucher programs, if widely implemented, would produce segregation-like effects nationwide: "These [segregated] academies [of the 1950s], which discriminated in admission based on race, allowed communities to continue de facto segregation. ... The same could easily reoccur around the county if modern voucher plans are adopted."

A third example comes from education activist Jonathan Kozol, who considers vouchers dangerous and claims voucher money could "be used for a David Duke School or a right-wing militia school or a Louis Farrakhan school." However, anti-discrimination provisions in voucher laws prohibit spending public money at such schools.

In fact, unlike its counterpart during fear-based choice, America's black community is clearly benefitting from freedom-based choice. It is more productive to look at private choice similarities and differences across time. If we do, our nation can approach this controversial policy issue in a way that will support, rather than corrupt, honest dialogue about how best to use vouchers to deliver educational services to *Brown*'s grandchildren in big city America.

Gerard Robinson served as legislative liaison for the D.C. Public Schools District (1999-2000). This article is excerpted from his chapter in the new book, Educational Freedom in Urban America, *Brown v. Board* after Half a Century *(Cato Institute, 2004).*

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A Salt Lake Parent Acts on Her Terribly Immodest Idea

by M. Royce Van Tassell

Kim Fowkes lives just west of Salt Lake City's Capitol Hill. PTA president at Washington Elementary for the past two years, she talks easily about the challenges involved in making sure her children get the education they need. When the conversation turns to her less-affluent neighbors, however, her face flushes and tears well up in her eyes.

Washington Elementary is nestled between Highway 89 and the west base of Capitol Hill. Like many elementary schools in the Salt Lake district, Washington's students come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Families in some neighborhoods enjoy the luxuries of an average household income approaching $90,000, while many others scrape by with less than $28,000. So many families speak Spanish at home that messages on Washington's phone system are in both English and Spanish.

Although she enjoys a lifestyle similar to her middle- and upper-income neighbors, Fowkes doesn't join them in sending her children to Wasatch or Ensign, two of the best elementary schools in the state. She is determined to make sure her children and their classmates receive a first-rate education at a neighborhood school.

She has worked with the school district to improve Washington, but declining enrollment and the seniority system have combined to push many of the best teachers out. Left behind are bright students the system doesn't seem to care about challenging. For many, the native tongue is Spanish.

"I'm just convinced that these kids can do better," Fowkes says, "but I just don't see a possibility for parents to make a difference. The students get by with slang English," she continues, "but they are not learning to read, write, and speak standard English. It's not fair. It's not what this country was founded on."

When a former assisted living center in the neighborhood closed recently, Fowkes had a terribly immodest idea: open her own school in it. She called Jody Millard, a friend who had worked and taught in a variety of private schools for more than 20 years, and told her about the idea. Hearing Kim's vision of a neighborhood school that held high expectations for all students, Jody confided she too had thought the building would make an excellent school. The two of them are now preparing to open the Capitol Hill Academy.

The Capitol Hill Academy will be a private elementary school serving students in grades K through 8. When running at full capacity, it would serve about 250 students. By using existing community resources like the city library, the planetarium, and the Children's Museum, Fowkes and Millard expect to keep tuition below what the state spends per pupil on education.

Of course, all of this is still hypothetical. The papers are all ready to be filed,

"When a former assisted living center in the neighborhood closed recently, Fowkes had a terribly immodest idea: open her own school in it."

and at least 25 of their neighbors' children want to attend, but two major obstacles stand in the way. First, the two women don't know when—or if—they will be able to rent the Salt Lake Home. The owner of the building, Zion's Securities Corp., understandably wants to know that the Capitol Hill Academy will be a financially viable tenant before signing a lease.

Therein lies the second problem. Kim Fowkes' vision for the Capitol Hill Academy is for it to serve the children in her neighborhood, many of whom can't afford transportation to send their children to other public schools. Paying thousands of dollars in tuition is out of the question. Fowkes is applying for every grant she can find, but even if those grants come through now, they won't last forever. At some point, she and her neighbors' children will need help.

In her mind, the best solution is for the state to implement parental choice. The state constitution guarantees a system of free public education, but she sees that system failing the children in her neighborhood.

Instead of having the district assign children to schools that fail them, Fowkes says the state should let parents choose where their children learn. If they want their children in a public school, a charter school, a magnet school, or a private school, the decision should be the parents'. Where they can afford to live shouldn't decide for them.

Fighting back the tears welling in her eyes, she cries, "That's just not fair."

M. Royce Van Tassell is executive director of Education Excellence Utah. His email address is **royce@edexutah.org**.

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FEDERAL INITIATIVES

Legislator Introduces National Education Tax Credit Program

Rep. Jim DeMint (R-South Carolina) introduced legislation at the end of March that would provide a tax credit for teachers who incur personal expenses in educating their students, as well as for individuals and corporations who donate money to any type of K-12 school or school tuition organization.

Under H.R. 4034, "The National Education Advancement and Teacher Relief Act," teachers would be able to receive a 75 percent tax credit worth up to $500 for out-of-pocket expenses incurred for qualified classroom expenses. In addition, individuals could receive a $500 credit—$1,000 for joint returns—for donations to schools or tuition groups. Corporations could receive a maximum credit of $100,000 that would not be subject to the Alternative Minimum Tax.

"This bill will direct more dollars to education," DeMint told *Talon News*. "By creating a significant incentive for generous and voluntary individual and corporate contributions to education, all types of schools—public, private, charter, and home schools—will receive additional funding.

"This legislation also increases local control and parental involvement and choice in education," he explained. "Keeping more education dollars in our own communities and out of the federal bureaucracy in Washington will strengthen education at all levels."

Talon News
April 1, 2004

Rep. Jim DeMint (R-South Carolina) introduced legislation at the end of March that would provide a tax credit for teachers who incur personal expenses in educating their students.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

D.C. Program Experiences Growing Interest

A recent *Washington Post* editorial reported that D.C. Parents for School Choice had provided the Washington Scholarship Fund with the names of more than 1,400 families representing 3,000 students who would like to be considered for the District's new voucher program. The editorial points out this response completely contradicts the critics who argued residents opposed the idea of school vouchers.

"If ever there was evidence of a demand among parents for educational options, this is it," the editorial said.

"Even before D.C. Parents for School Choice delivered names to the scholarship fund, it was plain that parents in the nation's capital were looking for alternatives to the troubled D.C. public schools ..." the editorial continued. "Parents are looking for something other than a public school system plagued by cost overruns, mismanaged payrolls, and an administration incapable of purchasing enough toilet paper and books. This fall, hundreds more low-income District students, armed with federally funded vouchers, will search for another educational home."

Students eligible for the voucher could receive up to $7,500 a year for tuition.

Washington Post
April 21, 2004

School Choice Roundup

by Robert Fanger

ARIZONA

Tuition Tax Credit Program Exceeds Projections

In April, the Arizona Department of Revenue (DOR) reported the School Tuition Tax Credit program helped more than 19,000 students attend the school of their choice in 2003, surpassing the projections made in a December 2003 Goldwater Institute report.

According to the DOR report, from 2002 to 2003 the number of scholarships awarded grew by 21 percent, while taxpayer donations increased by more than 11 percent. The growth rate of the program in 2003 was nearly double the 2002 rate, suggesting the program could save the state even more money than expected.

Goldwater Institute
April 8, 2004

COLORADO

Lawmakers Block Revival of Voucher Program

On April 23, members of the Colorado House of Representatives voted 33-32 to defeat a bill to give poor children vouchers to attend private schools. The bill was aimed at answering the objections of a Denver judge who blocked the program, which passed last year and is currently on hold pending a court appeal.

Some Republicans crossed party lines to vote against the bill.

Rep. Gayle Berry (R-Grand Junction) objected to this year's bill because she felt if the state alone paid for the voucher, without contributions from the local district, then less money would be left for those students who remain in public schools.

The bill would have created vouchers with values ranging from $2,000 to $5,000 a year, depending on student grade-level and how much funding the state provides the school district.

Sponsor Rep. Nancy Spence (R-Centennial) said children won't be able to get vouchers before the new school year begins.

"How long are you going to leave them in the same system, year after year, that is failing?" she asked lawmakers.

Currently, 11 districts received low or unsatisfactory academic performance ratings, which would qualify them to take part in the voucher program.

Daily Camera
April 24, 2004

FLORIDA

GI Vouchers Await House Vote, with Senate Future Uncertain

A measure that would provide school vouchers for the children of military families is making its way through the Florida legislature. The House version of the bill, H.B. 549, which is championed by Iraq veteran Rep. Carey Baker (R-Eustis), made any child of any current or former member of the military eligible for a $3,600 voucher. Although H.B. 549 met with widespread support in the House, it faced tougher questioning in the Senate.

With opponents calling for reform of existing voucher programs before the creation of new ones, Baker agreed to pare down the scope of the House bill by removing veter-

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ans and leaving only active members of the military, the reserves, and the National Guard. Baker estimated the change would reduce the number of eligible children from approximately 100,000 to 60,000. The House bill also was amended to prohibit home-schooling groups and correspondence schools from receiving McKay vouchers for disabled children.

The Senate Education Committee briefly considered the scaled-back legislation before committee chair Sen. Lee Constantine (R-Altamonte Springs) delayed the vote. Although the Senate bill, S.B. 1544, has other committees to clear after the Education Committee, Baker told the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* he was confident the legislation would become law.

Palm Beach Post
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
April 14, 2004

Pre-K Voucher Program Debated

Florida legislators are working to create the largest state-funded pre-kindergarten program in the country. In 2000, 59 percent of Florida's citizens voted to approve an amendment requiring the state to create by 2005 a voluntary, free, high-quality education program for all four-year-olds.

Thus far, members of the House and Senate have not been able to reach agreement on exactly how to fulfill the mandate. The challenge lies in giving public, private, and faith-based programs sufficient autonomy, while putting in place accountability measures and performance standards.

"It is probably one of the most challenging issues I've ever been involved in," Sen. Lisa Carlton (R-Osprey) told the *Miami Herald*.

"Because we don't have enough spaces in the public schools, it's necessary for Florida to partner with the private sector," she explained. "On the other hand, if you create too much regulation, too many prescriptive standards, the private sector is going to say, 'I don't need this.'"

The *Herald* also reported that Patrick Heffernan, president of Floridians for School Choice, is urging the state to allow education providers to continue to choose the curriculum and teacher standards and leave accountability for a child's performance to parents.

"Don't judge quality by input, by [education] degrees or the size of the classroom," Heffernan told the *Herald*. "Judge them by how well prepared these children are when they are finished."

Miami Herald
April 5, 2004

MINNESOTA

School District Warned: Change to Survive

With 5,500 students lost to charter schools and other competitors over the past five years and with thousands more expected to leave if the trend continues, the Minneapolis public school system must change some of its operations in order to survive, warned the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* in an April 16 editorial.

Other Minnesota school districts are facing similar enrollment shifts, with about one in six students (18 percent) across the state attending some kind of contract, alternative, charter, private, or homeschool program.

"Minneapolis school board members and the new superintendent they choose must consider new ways to govern, administer, and deliver education," the editorial recommended. "They must preserve successful methods *and* embrace change. Instead of viewing charter schools as threats that siphon students away, they should learn from the successes in those programs, replicate what works, and include and promote them as a public school choice."

Surveys suggest the changes the district needs to make for Minneapolis parents to reconsider the public schools do not involve rocket science. The two major concerns expressed by parents about city schools are the quality of academic programs and the lack of student discipline.

"Most families want the same things for their children: a good education delivered in an orderly, welcoming, safe environment," the editorial noted. "Public schools must provide this or students will opt out."

Minneapolis Star Tribune
April 16, 2004

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Senate Revives Voucher Legislation

In February, a voucher bill failed to pass the New Hampshire House by just one vote, 172-171. On April 22, another voucher bill was *approved* by just one vote by the New Hampshire Senate Education Committee, which voted 11-10 to send the measure to the full Senate.

The prospects for the latest bill look promising in both chambers, according to House Education Committee Chairman Steve L'Heureux.

"The key here is that we've never had this, and we can argue for years about this issue, but until we do it, until we pass something, until we see how it works, we'll never know," he told the *Concord Monitor*.

The new bill would provide vouchers to families with household incomes of up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, with priority going to those at 200 percent and below. The maximum voucher amount made available would be about $3,600 for a family of four making $18,000 or less a year.

In the program's first year, 1,200 vouchers would be available to students in first and second grades, with the program expanding each year to reach 14,000 students in grades 1-8 after seven years. High school students and children currently enrolled in private schools would not be eligible.

"We know local public schools should not try to be all things for all students," Sen. Dick Green (R-Rochester), chairman of the finance committee and bill sponsor, told the *Concord Monitor*. "As we know, low-income parents often don't have a choice."

Concord Monitor
April 23, 2004

RHODE ISLAND

Group Urges Legislators to Enact Tax Credit

The Catholic Schools Parents Association testified before the Rhode Island Senate Finance Committee that the 30,000 students who attend independent or Catholic schools save the state an estimated $600 million in education costs every year.

The hearing was in regards to a bill sponsored by Sen. Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Providence) that would offer a dollar-for-dollar tax credit up to $200 for donations made by individuals ($250 for married couples) to a tuition scholarship program. Corporations would get a 75 percent tax credit of up to $100,000 or 90 percent if the business makes a two-year commitment.

"Low- and middle-income families cannot afford tuition anymore," Bruce Daigle, director of the Catholic Schools Parents Association, told the *Providence Journal*. "Many are forced to withdraw their children from Catholic schools."

Rhode Island already has experienced a 9 percent drop in enrollment in its urban Catholic schools, according to Daigle. The Diocese of Providence recently announced two schools would be closed because of declining enrollments. Daigle also explained that because of the closures, the public school system could see as many as 150 new students this fall.

"This bill will ease the burden on inner-city schools," he said.

Providence Journal
March 24, 2004

TEXAS

Governor Announces Support for Pilot Voucher Program

In April, Texas Gov. Rick Perry announced he would not object to the inclusion of a pilot school voucher program in any package of legislation designed to address the financing of public education.

Perry called lawmakers into special session in April to find an alternative to the share-the-wealth school finance system that has been dubbed "Robin Hood." During an Austin news conference, Perry said his plan currently contains no provision for vouchers, but he is open to the idea.

"Look, I'm a proponent of a school choice pilot program—always have been," Perry told the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. "If it becomes debated, gets placed on a piece of legislation, we'll look at [that] entire piece of legislation.

"And I would hope that a legislator who saw the opportunity to put 2.5 billion new dollars into public schools, to give a 17 percent decrease in residential [property taxes] in the state of Texas would not be giving thought to killing a piece of legislation because there was one small item in there they disagreed with."

Perry's goal for the special session is to increase the state's contribution to public schools by $2.5 billion, while cutting property taxes.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram
April 17, 2004

WISCONSIN

Voucher Students Maintain Achievement Gains

A follow-up to a study conducted three years ago shows Milwaukee's voucher program has prompted sustained achievement gains for the city's public elementary schools.

Harvard University economist Caroline Hoxby, who conducted both studies, concluded the school choice program spurred public schools to improve the quality of education they provide. The study was published in the *Swedish Economic Policy Review*.

"Adding the new years of data allows us to see that the good results have lasted," Hoxby told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. "A lot of people thought that this was a blip that was going to go away."

Some Milwaukee school administrators agree with Hoxby's conclusion. They have reported that the growth of the voucher program after the 1998 court decision—which allowed participation by private schools with a religious affiliation—has prompted them to compete more aggressively for the city's students.

Hoxby's argument is that vouchers can spur improvements in public schools by threatening to take away students and the money that comes with them.

Martin Carnoy, a professor of education and economics at Stanford University, disagreed with Hoxby's analysis. He argued Hoxby's findings result from an anomaly of one or two years when test scores in some Milwaukee public schools showed marked improvement above those in a control group of Wisconsin schools outside Milwaukee.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
April 13, 2004

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Minorities in Arizona Schools More Likely to Be Labeled Special Ed

Remedy: Universal screening and parental choice

by George A. Clowes

Children enrolled in Arizona public schools are more likely to find themselves placed in a special education program if they are members of a racial group that constitutes a minority in their school, according to a new study from the Goldwater Institute.

Calling the misidentification of special education students "a deep-seated feature of public education in Arizona," the study suggests a three-pronged reform strategy: universal screening, parental choice, and a revised special education funding formula.

Findings Confirm Earlier Research

Using school-level data for Arizona from a 2000 survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR), the study confirms a pattern established in earlier research of over-enrollment of minority students in special education programs. This was found to be the case both for the individual and the combined rates of children with Emotionally Disturbed, Mentally Retarded, and Specific Learning Disability labels.

For example, when comparing the combined rates of all three disabilities, white males in schools enrolling 75 percent or more white students are placed in special education at only half the rate (11.9 percent versus 23.6 percent) as white males in schools enrolling 25 percent or fewer white students. Because of the relationship between housing segregation and wealth, schools with 25 percent or fewer white students are considered to serve relatively lower-income families, and schools with 75 percent or more white students are considered to serve relatively higher-income families.

While a higher special education placement rate does occur when whites are in the minority in school, that result is not unexpected, since poverty and the attendants of poverty—such as poor prenatal care and poor nutrition—are regarded as the primary causes of many disabilities.

"As discussed in previous research, one would expect some decline in white disability rates in more predominantly white schools and/or districts due to the role of poverty in disability labels," explained the study's author, Matthew Ladner, director of the Goldwater Institute Center for Economic Prosperity.

A similar decline would be expected for minority students attending schools where they are in the majority ... but in fact an *increase* is observed.

When comparing the combined rates of the three disabilities defined above, American Indian males in schools that have 75 percent or more white students are labeled at a rate 78 percent higher (43.1 percent versus 24.2 percent) than American Indian males in schools with 25 percent or fewer white students. For Hispanics, the comparable rates are 64 percent higher (21.2 percent versus 12.9 percent). For African-American males, the comparable rates are 21 percent higher (36.2 percent versus 30.0 percent).

"These findings turn conventional wisdom about the contributing causes of learning disabilities on its head," writes Ladner. "These results come about despite the fact that minority students attending predominantly white schools are less likely on average to grow up in poverty than minority students attending predominantly minority schools."

Diagnosis

Why would minority special education rates be substantially higher in predominantly white districts, where average family incomes for minority students are likely to be higher than in inner-city school districts?

The Goldwater Institute study, titled "Race to the Bottom: Minority Children and Special Education in Arizona Public Schools," identifies three broad possible causes: perverse financial incentives, the desire to manipulate accountability test scores, and racism.

Research studies have indicated that financial incentives play a pernicious role in special education rates. For example, Manhattan Institute scholars Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster found state officials referred to the special education funding system used in most states—including Arizona—as a "bounty system" where school districts were compensated for each additional student classified as disabled. (See "'Bounty' Funding Pushes More Kids into Special Ed," *School Reform News*, February 2003.)

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools and districts are rated not only by their overall scores, but also by the scores of student subsets, such as African-American, Hispanic, or economically disadvantaged students. However, if low-performing minority children are labelled as disabled, they are exempted from normal testing. Evidence of this practice is apparent in Arizona, according to Ladner.

While racism is impossible to definitively evaluate, findings from previous research indicate the possibility that special education programs may be used to segregate minority children.

In addition, recent medical evidence shows public schools often mistakenly label children as having a specific learning disability when in fact their condition results from a teaching deficit in early reading instruction. Two out of three children labeled with a specific learning disability could have avoided special education placement if they had received intensive early remedial reading intervention, according to estimates from research by Reid Lyon of the National Institutes for Health.

Remedy

The study recommends a three-fold strategy to address the over-representation of minority students in special education in Arizona.

The first of these recommendations is to change Arizona's special education funding formula to remove any incentives for labeling children as learning disabled rather than in need of remedial education.

Since traditional teacher referrals to special education are unreliable, the second recommendation is to use a better identification technique known as universal screening. This alternative screening procedure shows significant promise in reducing misidentification by testing all students at an early age and then providing remedial sessions to all students who are below grade level.

The third recommendation is to institute a program like Florida's McKay Scholarship Program, which allows disabled children in the state to take all the funds designated for their education to a public or private school of their choice. This would allow Arizona's disabled children to enjoy the benefits of an "individualized education plan" with the education provider selected specifically for them.

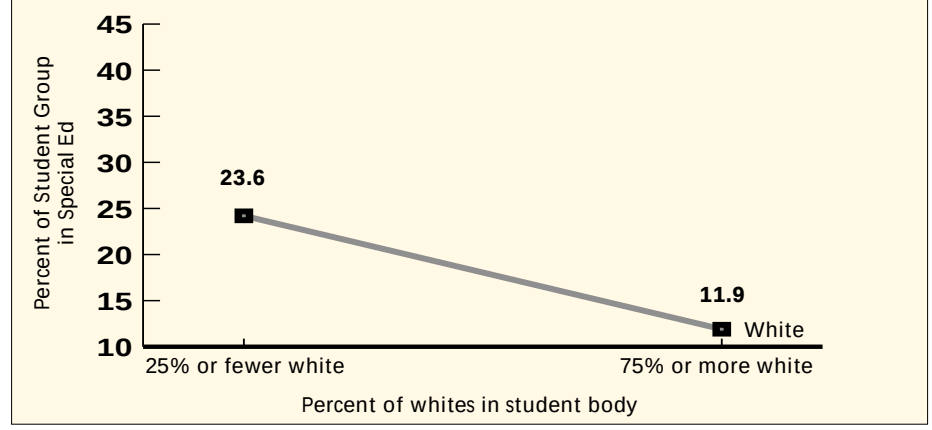
In addition, a McKay-type scholarship program would provide public school administrators with a powerful incentive to address any inaccuracies in the disability assessment process and any instructional inadequacies in the regular education process that produce so-called "learning disabilities."

"Public school officials commonly complain about not having enough money to educate special needs children," notes Ladner, "so it seems unlikely they could complain about parents taking their children and their (inadequate) funding elsewhere."

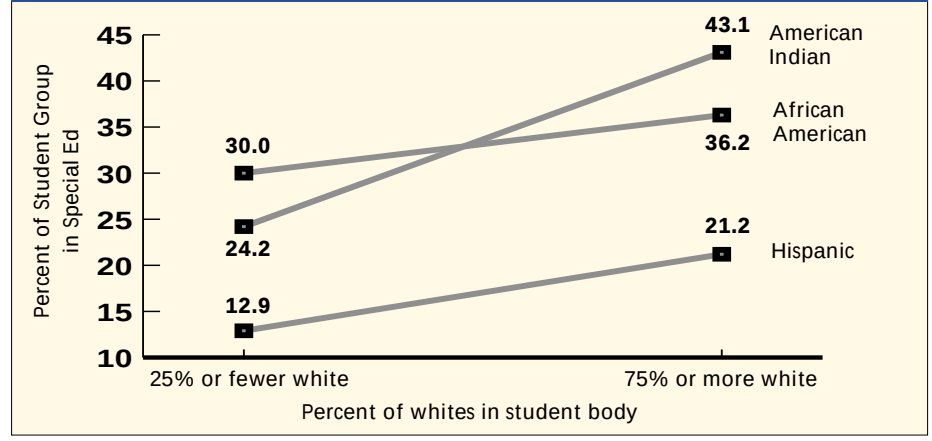
Ladner conducted an earlier study for the Commonwealth Foundation, published in February under the title, "Racial Bias in Pennsylvania Special Education."

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

Whites less likely to be placed in special ed in lower-poverty schools



Minorities more likely to be placed in special ed in lower-poverty schools



INTERNET INFO

The May 10, 2004 Goldwater Institute Policy Report No. 193 by Matthew Ladner, "Race to the Bottom: Minority Children and Special Education in Arizona Public Schools," is available online at **http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/pdf/materials/442.pdf**.

The February 2004 Commonwealth Foundation Policy Brief by Matthew Ladner, "Racial Bias in Pennsylvania Special Education," is available online at **http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/education/nr20040211.shtml**.

The December 2002 Manhattan Institute report by Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, "Effects of Funding Incentives on Special Education Enrollment," Civic Report No. 32, is available from the Institute's Web site at **http://www.manhattan-institute.org/cr_32.pdf**.

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One-Stop Shopping for Alternative Certification

Who better to teach U.S. government as a second career than Jon, who has worked for 25 years for the Federal Aviation Administration? He has coordinated activities involving local, state, and regional offices and has ushered program initiatives through the federal budget process to get them funded. But where does he go to find out how to become certified to teach?

The traditional paths many would-be educators must take to achieve their teacher certification simply take too long or don't fit a working person's schedule. Alternative certification programs can be a perfect solution—but only if potential teachers know about them.

Enter the National Center for Alternative Certification (NCAC), a one-stop clearinghouse of information for people like Jon.

The clearinghouse, launched in February, can be accessed through **http://www.teach-now.org**, an interactive Web site that provides prospective teachers with the information they need to find an alternative certification program that's a good fit for them.

For example, if Jon wants to teach in Maryland, he can go to the Teach Now! Web site and select Maryland in the State Program Profiles search bar. He will then click on Alternative Teacher Certification Routes in the State, and then on Resident Teacher Certificate. He will find out that to enter a program in a school system, he will need:

- a liberal arts bachelor's degree in the subject to be taught at the secondary level;
- 3.0 grade point average in the major to be taught; and,
- qualifying scores on the Praxis I and II tests.

He also will need 135 clock hours of study in teaching skill areas such as models of teaching, planning, and classroom management.

NCAC has plans to offer a search engine to match a person's interests and background with alternative certification programs that meet his or her criteria. The searchable database will contain descriptions of all alternative certification programs in the country. For example, every district in Florida has been mandated to develop its own alternative certification program, and these individual programs will be part of the database.

In addition to the Web site, NCAC will have a toll-free call center to walk potential teachers through the stages of alternative certification. The content on the NCAC Web site is based on the National Center for Education Information's comprehensive guide, *Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis*. The publication is currently available at the NCAC Web site, free of charge.

Starting in Fall 2004, NCAC will provide technical assistance and outreach to states, localities, and others interested in creating alternative route programs. In addition to organizing workshops and conferences, teams of individuals with experience in research-based implementation of alternative routes will be available to provide technical assistance.

Another feature of NCAC is the annual conference to foster face-to-face communication with colleagues and explore the latest research and policy issues surrounding alternative teacher certification. The first annual conference was held February 1-3; presenters included a diverse panel of federal education officials, researchers, state policy makers, and local project leaders.

The National Center for Alternative Certification is supported by a $2.25 million grant from the Office of Innovation and Improvement.

A longer version of this article was first published in the March 15, 2004 issue of Education Innovator*, a weekly publication of the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) in the U.S. Department of Education. To receive an email copy of* Education Innovator *and for more information on OII's activities, visit* **http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/index.html**.

Internet Information on Alternative Certification

National Center for Alternative Certification - **http://www.teach-now.org**
National Center for Education Information - **http://www.ncei.com**
Troops-to-Teachers - **http://www.ed.gov/programs/troops/index.html**
Transition to Teaching - **http://www.ed.gov/programs/transitionteach/index.html**

Office of Innovation and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education

The federal government's Office of Innovation and Improvement was created in December 2002 with a budget of about $2 billion and a staff of about 100, and placed under the direction of Deputy Undersecretary of Education Nina Rees. As well as managing some two dozen competitive grant programs, ranging from charter schools to dropout prevention, OII also coordinates the public school choice and supplemental education services provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. (See "Rees Takes Helm at Office of Innovation and Improvement," *School Reform News*, February 2003.)

One of OII's tasks is to look at new ways school districts and states implement education reforms in order to improve student achievement. Promising and innovative practices are promoted in the *Education Innovator* newsletter. Back issues are available at OII's Web site at **http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/index.html**.

OII's Web site also provides information about the office's programs and services, parental options, and family rights. The Web site contains links to other sites and news articles as part of the continuing discussion of education improvement.

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Truth IS ON Our Side

an interview with
John F. Kirtley
by George A. Clowes

Although he lived in Tampa, Florida, venture capital entrepreneur John F. Kirtley got his introduction to education reform in New York City's South Bronx neighborhood. During the 1990s, his frequent business trips to Wall Street had brought him into contact with fellow finance executive Peter Flanigan, who had established a philanthropic effort called the Patron's Program where participants would use their business skills and knowledge—and donations—to support individual Catholic schools in low-income areas of the city.

It was a revelation to Kirtley, a product of the public schools, to find so many low-income parents who were willing to pay for their children to attend these struggling private schools when there was a tuition-free public school nearby. He subsequently embarked on a series of education reform efforts that eventually led to him leaving the world of venture capital, where he had been very successful, and devoting himself full-time to expanding parental choice in education.

A native of Iowa, Kirtley moved to Florida when he was 16. After graduating from the University of Virginia and working in New York for four years, he co-founded the Tampa-based venture capital firm, FCP Investors, specializing in management buyouts of small companies. In 1988 he created a scholarship fund to offer private school scholarships of up to $1,500 for low-income families around Tampa Bay. When he received 17 applications for every scholarship, he increased his school choice efforts by working for the enactment of the nation's first statewide voucher program, and by supporting the creation of a corporate tax credit program to fund private school scholarships for children in low-income families.

In September 2002, Kirtley was named president and CEO of Children First America (CFA), a school choice organization formed 12 years ago to replicate the privately funded scholarship model across the country. CFA has recently merged with the American Education Reform Council to create the Alliance For School Choice, which will be headed by Institute for Justice veteran Clint Bolick. Kirtley recently spoke with *School Reform News* Managing Editor George Clowes.

Clowes: *How did you become interested in education reform?*
Kirtley: My experience had been in the business world completely. Then came my exposure to the Patron's Program. I was assigned to a wonderful school called Christ the King in a very low-income neighborhood in the South Bronx. That was my real first exposure to private education, which until then I had thought of as expensive and exclusive. It was quite a shock to find this K-8 school with about 300 black and Hispanic students who all met the standards for the free or reduced lunch program.

Also, I was stunned to find that these low-income parents were paying tuition of $3,200 per year per child. To do that, they would be working two jobs, doing without phone service, and so on. It was really amazing.

At about that time, in 1997-98, I read about the private scholarship programs that were being formed through Children First America and so I decided to start one in Tampa Bay. I was very fortunate that just after I had decided this, John Walton and Ted Forstmann announced the formation of the Children's Scholarship Fund. They were looking for local partners to match funds with, and I said, "I'm your guy in Tampa Bay." That enabled us to double our funding.

We formed our scholarship program in 1998 and offered 700 partial scholarships to help low-income parents send their children to private schools, with a maximum of $1,500. We did very little advertising but we got 12,000 applications for 700 scholarships. There was obviously a huge demand for parental choice among low-income parents in Florida.

Clowes: *So you were just trying to help low-income parents who wanted their children educated in a private school?*
Kirtley: I absolutely had a desire to help the parents, but there was a broader purpose, too. I had started to become more politically aware and discovered I was probably a libertarian. During that discovery process, I read Milton Friedman's wonderful book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, and when I read the chapter on education it hit

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home with me for a number of reasons.

Our venture capital firm had once owned a company that had 100 percent of a small market. Our prices were higher than they would have been with competition, our quality was not as high, and our customers had fewer choices. Well, we soon had competition. A group of managers left the company that we owned, started another one, and offered the product at half our price. Our company went bankrupt. That drove home to me the power of the customer—through their ability to choose—to demand better quality, lower prices, and more variety.

When I was working with the school in New York, I asked the parents why they weren't saving the tuition and sending their children to the free public school just down the street. You see, I was a public school guy, and I had had a very good experience. And they said, "Because they won't learn as well there, and nothing is more important to us than our kids' learning."

So, truth be told, it wasn't just a desire to help the parents and their children—though that was certainly a huge part of it—I also was compelled by what I was seeing in terms of a real-life illustration of what Milton Friedman had talked about in his book. And then I was just stunned when we got the 12,000 applications.

At the same time, Jeb Bush ran for governor on a platform of school choice for children in chronically failing public schools, and he won. Since we had so many parents who were obviously interested in parental choice and educational freedom, we worked to help him get his education program passed, which was done in early 1999. It was the first statewide voucher program in the country.

"I was stunned to find that these low-income parents were paying tuition of $3,200 per year per child. To do that, they would be working two jobs, doing without phone service, and so on. It was really amazing."

We were very excited about that, because we expected a great number of children would get vouchers. If schools got two F-grades in four years, they had to offer vouchers to their students, and in the first year the schools were graded, there were about 70 F-rated schools with about 60,000 students. But the next year, every single school got off the failing list.

There were only two logical explanations: Either the schools had improved dramatically under the mere threat of competition, or the grades were not accurate. I felt very bad for Florida's low-income parents because though I felt the schools had definitely improved, I didn't think the schools had improved enough in one year to eliminate every single failing school. There wasn't a single "failing" school in our area and yet we had received 12,000 applications from parents who wanted an option.

That's when we started to work towards passing the corporate tax credit law to make more choices available to those families. We have no personal income tax in Florida—that's why many people move here—and so it had to be a corporate income tax credit. We got that passed in May of 2001 and it took effect in January of 2002. By that time, I had quit my job and was working in school choice full-time.

Clowes: *The newspaper coverage of Florida's school choice programs seems to report every problem prominently, whether it's large or small. Why aren't problems in the public schools given the same priority?*
Kirtley: I ask that same question all the time of the newspapers, especially the one with the most biased reporting, the *Palm Beach Post*. Let me just give you an example.

One of the charges by the *Post* was that we don't know if the choice schools are safe—physically safe. They were claiming we had no evidence the schools were in compliance with all the numerous laws pertaining to health and safety at private schools. Although there were no complaints and no reported incidents, the *Post* was writing stories about how you just don't know—they could be unsafe.

About that time, a ceiling collapsed in the media center at a recently renovated public high school in Miami. Fortunately, it was on a weekend, otherwise it would have been crowded and children could have been killed.

So I said to the *Post* reporter, "You're writing these stories about potential problems in choice schools, and yet you don't want to write a story about an actual incident where a roof caved in at a public school. Why is that?" And he said, "That's a local issue."

The *Post* has refused to publish numerous letters to the editor from me, from parents, and from school administrators. They refuse to publish letters from CEOs of companies in the tax credit program. They even refuse to publish letters from the Commissioner of Education. I think if a paper is going to have a strong bias against something, they should at least have the courage to publish letters with opposing views.

Clowes: *The No Child Left Behind Act attempts to hold public schools accountable for results, but it doesn't apply to choice schools. Shouldn't private schools be tested, too?*
Kirtley: The first thing we have to ask ourselves is: "What does accountability mean?" To me, accountability means: If you don't do the job, you lose the business. That's accountability in the business world.

Now, if you look at the typical situation with a public school in a low-income neighborhood, if the public school is not doing the job, what consequences are there? Usually, none. The school doesn't lose the business, and so there is no accountability.

Compare that to a private school educating a child with one of our scholarships. The scholarships aren't given to schools, they're given to children. The children and parents are the customers, not the schools. If the private school is not doing the job, the parent can take the scholarship immediately to another private school. Private schools have to earn the right to educate children every single day, or they lose them. To me, that is a higher level of accountability than a public school in a low-income neighborhood where the parents are powerless to move their children.

We did a survey last year of 400 schools in the tax credit program and found that 95 percent already were administering a nationally recognized norm-referenced test. We did the survey because we had to respond to a media environment that is very hostile towards school choice in Florida. We are working on legislation that would require private schools participating in the tax credit program to administer a norm-referenced, nationally recognized standardized test—even though most are already doing that.

We're also working on a requirement for a third-party research entity to analyze the learning gains of choice students on a longitudinal basis. The students certainly are behind when they start, but I'm convinced they are making tremendous learning gains. To be able to demonstrate that would be a very politically potent thing to have in the fight for more school choice.

Clowes: *How much additional regulation will private schools accept before they begin to balk at losing their unique identities and missions?*
Kirtley: What we have found in Florida is a wide range of private schools in terms of price. Some exclusive suburban schools cost $10,000 a year, while most of the ones in urban areas are relatively inexpensive. The urban schools are the ones that are helping our children in the tax credit program. For example, in Tampa Bay the average tuition of the schools in our program is about $4,000. These schools tend to have a somewhat higher tolerance for the risk of government intrusion.

Last fall, the Florida Department of Education (DOE) decided that private schools participating in the McKay or tax credit scholarship programs would have to submit a form to the DOE showing they were in compliance with the health, safety, and fire code laws pertaining to private schools. A very small percentage of schools reacted negatively to that on the grounds of government interference and chose to leave the program. They were fairly high-end schools helping just a few students in our program. But the schools that were located in low-income areas had no problem with the DOE requirement.

Clowes: *How do you see school choice options developing in the future, and what is the biggest obstacle to that development?*
Kirtley: Right now in Florida, we have three programs. We have the Opportunity Scholarship program, the A+ plan, which currently has only about 800 children statewide. It's being litigated in the courts and its fate will depend on how that turns out.

Then there's the McKay Scholarship program, which has not been challenged in the courts. The program serves over 12,000 students and I think it will continue to grow as quickly as supply can expand. It's a wonderfully designed program, with the per-pupil amount the same as in the public school, and no cap on participation. In fact, the Friedman Foundation called it the best voucher program in the country.

The tax credit program has a total funding cap of $88 million per year and a scholarship cap of $3,500 per student. In my opinion, $3,500 is too low for a per-pupil amount. It's too low to provide a high-quality education—although many schools do, through miraculous efforts—and it's too low to spur a material growth in the supply of private schools in low-income areas.

The opponents of school choice are very concerned about what's going on in Florida because they see how widely these three programs have been accepted by parents. They get very concerned when they see 3,000 low-income, minority parents going all the way to Tallahassee to attend a rally to support the tax credit program. It frightens the dickens out of them. And so they're doing all they can to push us back. Unfortunately, they have a willing partner in the press in Florida.

"The opponents to choice might have more money—and their allies in the press might buy ink by the barrel—but we have the benefit of having truth on our side. I would always rather be in our position."

To truly further school choice in Florida, we have to protect the McKay scholarship program, which is very well designed. In my opinion we need to convert the tax credit program to a voucher program, in order to have the funding to reach many more low-income students. Further, the per-pupil amount must be adequate to help create supply. That can only be done after we win the Blaine amendment case in Florida, which may take a couple of years to resolve.

In the interim, we must continue to build our grassroots support for choice, and we must make support for choice more bipartisan. We must also show that choice is working to improve the lives of children in both public and private schools.

These are high goals, and they will be difficult to accomplish in Florida's highly polarized and partisan environment, especially with our media very biased against choice. But we will succeed. The opponents to choice might have more money—and their allies in the press might buy ink by the barrel—but we have the benefit of having truth on our side. I would always rather be in our position.

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"Coaches Who Prey" Wins 2003 Education Reporting Award

by George A. Clowes

At an awards ceremony in San Francisco on April 17, Christine Willmsen and Maureen O'Hagan of the *Seattle Times* were presented with the Fred M. Hechinger Grand Prize for Distinguished Education Reporting by the Education Writers Association (EWA), the national professional association of education reporters and writers. Willmsen and O'Hagan won the award for their account of "Coaches Who Prey: The Abuse of Girls and the System That Allows it," a series that looked at how coaches got away with sexually abusing their female athletes.

"A stunning bravura display of investigative reporting, a thorough and engrossing read, and the kind of story that changes the way people look at things," the judges said of Willmsen and O'Hagen's work. "The series demonstrated the finest qualities of investigative reporting. As shocking as the abuse of the female athletes was, it was equally distressing to read about how the problem was covered up—by school boards, coaches, and even the educators' union."

The other finalists were Dan Golden of the *Wall Street Journal*, Matt Bach of the *Flint Journal*, and Doug Most of *Boston Magazine*. Recent winners of the Hechinger Grand Prize include Eric Eyre and Scott Finn, *Charleston Gazette*; Patrick Healy, *Boston Globe*; Ken Weiss, *Los Angeles Times*; and Tim Simmons, *Raleigh News & Observer*.

EWA hosts a National Seminar for education reporters each year and combines the event with the presentation of national awards for best reporting in a range of categories: newspapers, magazines, special-interest publications, television, and radio.

A full list of winners is provided below.

1. NEWSPAPERS UNDER 100,000 CIRCULATION

A. Breaking or Hard News

First Prize: Josh Funk and Julie Mah, *Wichita Eagle*, "BOE Settlement Hidden"
Second Prize: David Hunn, *Bakersfield Californian*, "Parents Demand Novel Be Banned"
Special Citations: Dorie Turner, *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, "The Shumaker Scandal"
Ben Evans, Jim Shamp, Angela D. Forest, Christopher Kirkpatrick, Mark Schultz, Eric Ferreri, *Herald-Sun (N.C.)*, "NCCU Mold"

B. Feature, News Feature or Issue Package

First Prize: Eric Alan Barton, *New Times Broward/Palm Beach*, "Jeb's Boy"
Second Prize: Jo Ciavaglia, *Bucks County Courier Times (Pa.)*, "Building a New World"
Special Citations: Charles Adamson, *Bakersfield Californian*, "Special Education"
Erin Walsh, *North County Times (Ca.)*, "Educational Crossroads: The Small School with the Big Problem"

C. Series or Group of Articles

First Prize: Challen Stephens, *Huntsville Times*, "Separate Again"
Second Prize: David Hunn, *Bakersfield Californian*, "Culture of Truancy"
Special Citation: Eric Ferreri, Kim Sweet, Angela D. Forest, *Herald-Sun (N.C.)*, "The Graying of the Gown"

D. Investigative Reporting

First Prize: Karen Ayres, *Times of Trenton*, "Most NJ School Buses Fail Inspection"
Second Prize (tie): Molly Walsh, *Burlington Free Press*, "Breach of Trust"
Matt Bach, *Flint Journal*, "Frequent Flier"
Special Citation: Mike Fitzgerald, *Belleville News-Democrat (Ill.)*, "Illicit Purchasing of Testing Materials"

E. Opinion

First Prize: David Awbrey, *Burlington Free Press*, "Tax Revolt"
Second Prize: Chuck Strouse, *New Times Broward/Palm Beach*, "Steal from the Kiddies"

2. NEWSPAPERS OVER 100,000 CIRCULATION

A. Breaking or Hard News

First Prize: June Kronholz, Robert Tomsho, Daniel Golden, Robert S. Greenberger, Sholnn Freeman, Matt Murray, Charles Forelle, *Wall Street Journal*, "Race Matters"
Second Prize: Dana Tofig, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "No Child Left Behind"
Special Citation: Norman Draper, *Star Tribune*, "Superintendent Pay"

INTERNET INFO

Further information about the Education Writers Association, including a full list of winners and links to many of the stories, is available at the Association's Web site at **http://www.ewa.org**.

B. Feature, News Feature or Issue Package

First Prize: Christopher Shea, Kate Zernike, Greg Winter, Jane Gross, James Schembari, *New York Times Education Life*, "Sticker Shock"
Second Prize: Michael Winerip, *New York Times Education Life*, "How to Win a Rhodes"
Special Citation: Bill Schackner, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "May the Course Be with You"

C. Series or Group of Articles

First Prize: Daniel Golden, *Wall Street Journal*, "White Affirmative Action"
Second Prize: Dale Mezzacappa, Susan Snyder, Martha Woodall, Toni Callas, Kellie Patrick, Dan Hardy, Connie Langland, Alletta Emeno, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "No Child Left Behind"
Special Citation: Aimee Edmondson, Ruma Banerji, Sherri Drake, Wayne Risher, *Commercial Appeal*, "Stress Tests: Teacher Survey"

D. Investigative Reporting

First Prize: Christine Willmsen, Maureen O'Hagan, *Seattle Times*, "Coaches Who Prey: The Abuse of Girls and the System That Allows it" **http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/news/local/coaches**
Second Prize: Kimberly Miller, S.V. Date, *Palm Beach Post*, "Florida School Vouchers: A Lack of Accountability"
Special Citations: Debbie Cenziper, Jason Grotto, *Miami Herald*, "Crumbling Schools"
Aileen Dodd, David Milliron, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "Gwinnett County, Ga., School Discipline Under-Reporting"

E. Opinion

First Prize: Geri Throne, *Orlando Sentinel*, "Voucher Voodoo"
Second Prize: Joe Copeland, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, "Road to Mediocrity"
Special Citations: Linda Fandel, *Des Moines Register*, "No Child Left Behind"
Louis Freedberg, *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Reclaiming Childhood"

3. BEAT REPORTING—SMALL MEDIA OR MARKET

First Prize: Matt Bach, *Flint Journal*
Second Prize: Julianne Basinger, *Chronicle of Higher Education*
Special Citation: Jeffrey Amy, *Mobile Register*

4. BEAT REPORTING—LARGE MEDIA OR MARKET

First Prize: Jonathan Rockoff, *Baltimore Sun*
Second Prize: Matthew Pinzur, *Miami Herald*
Special Citations: Robert Frahm, *Hartford Courant*
David McKay Wilson, *Journal News*

5. MAGAZINES—NATIONAL CIRCULATION

Special Citation: John Cloud, *Time Magazine*, "Inside the New SAT"

6. MAGAZINES—REGIONAL OR LOCAL CIRCULATION

First Prize: Doug Most, *Boston Magazine*, "Teachers' Dirty Looks"
Second Prize: Marc Fisher, *Washington Post Magazine*, "Pass/Fail"
Special Citation: Tyler Currie, *Washington Post Magazine*, "Reaching Rommel"

7. SPECIAL INTEREST, INSTITUTIONAL AND TRADE PUBLICATIONS

First Prize: Kevin Bushweller, Linda Jacobson, Robert Johnson, *Education Week*, "Nation at Risk: The Next Generation"
Second Prize: Jeffrey Selingo, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "The Money Crunch: The Changing Relationship Between States and Public Higher Education"
Special Citations: Jeff Archer, *Education Week*, "Agent of Change"
Samantha Stainburn, *Teacher Magazine*, "What's So Funny?"

8. TELEVISION—HARD NEWS AND INVESTIGATIVE

First Prize: Tisha Thompson, *WMAR-TV*, "Filthy Schools"
Second Prize: Jeff Hirsh, *WKRC-TV*, "S-T-R-S Investigation"

9. TELEVISION—DOCUMENTARY AND FEATURE

First Prize: John Merrow, John D. Tulenko, *Learning Matters, Inc.*, "Public Schools, Inc."
Second Prize: Jeff Hirsh, *WKRC-TV*, "Learning the Language"

10. RADIO

First Prize: Amy Tardif, *WGCU Public Media*, "Summer Reading Help"
Second Prize: Stacey Farb, *KNRC AM 1150*, "Denver School of the Arts"
Special Citation: Tim Pugmire, *Minnesota Public Radio*, "A Lesson on Learning: Behind No Child Left Behind"

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Emerson Prizes Recognize Outstanding Students Around the Globe

When he founded *The Concord Review* as a quarterly journal in 1987 to encourage good academic writing by secondary students, Will Fitzhugh didn't limit essay contributions to just U.S. high school students. That's fortunate, because the decline of writing ability is an affliction that goes beyond borders, as a recent article from the United Kingdom indicates.

"Bright youngsters ... are in danger of dropping out of university because they cannot string their thoughts together to write an essay, according to the man heading a [UK] Government inquiry into exams reform," wrote reporter Richard Garner in the U.K.'s *Independent* newspaper.

Since its inception 17 years ago, *The Concord Review* has published 638 essays, averaging more than 5,000 words each, by students of history from 43 states in the U.S. and 33 other countries.

"*The Concord Review* offers young people a unique incentive to think and write carefully and well," said historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., adding the *Review* "inspires and honors historical literacy."

This year marks the tenth year the *Review* has awarded Ralph Waldo Emerson Prizes for student work of outstanding academic promise in history at the secondary level. These awards have now gone to a total of 35 high school students from 15 states in the U.S. and Czechoslovakia, New Zealand, Canada, Russia, and Japan.

This year's awards were hosted by the History Department of The Horace Mann School in the Bronx, New York, in the afternoon on Saturday, April 17, 2004. The winners—whose essay topics included the 1892 Homestead Strike, the Bolshevik recovery in the summer of 1917, and the 1918 influenza epidemic—were:

- Jacob C. Goldberg, a senior at The Horace Mann School in New York (Amherst 2008);
- Kimberly S. Greenberg of Great Neck North High School in New York (now at Wesleyan);
- Jennifer Hsiao of Hall High School in Hartford, Connecticut (now at Princeton);
- Michael Korzinstone of Upper Canada College in Toronto, Canada (now at the Wharton School); and
- Jan Michal Zapendowski of St. Mark's School of Dallas, Texas (now at Brown).

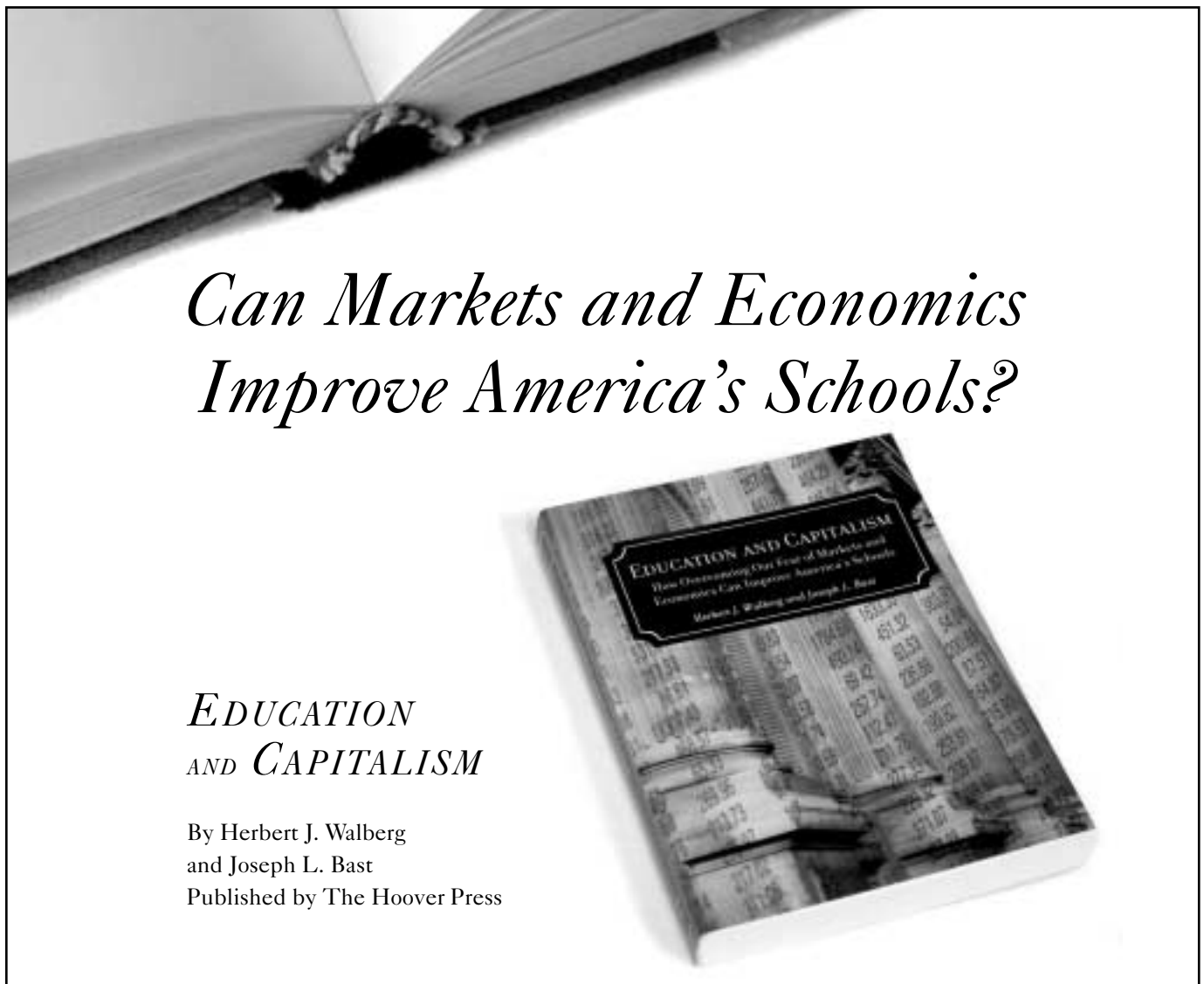
Each Emerson Prize laureate received a check for $3,000 and a copy of David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Truman*. McCullough wrote that *The Concord Review* is "original, important, and greatly needed, now more than ever, with the problem of historic illiteracy growing steadily worse among the high school generation nearly everywhere in the country."

Fitzhugh is currently seeking foundation support to continue publication of *The Concord Review*.

— G.C.

INTERNET INFO

Copies of essays by Emerson Prize winners are available online at the Web site of *The Concord Review* at **http://www.tcr.org**.



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and Joseph L. Bast
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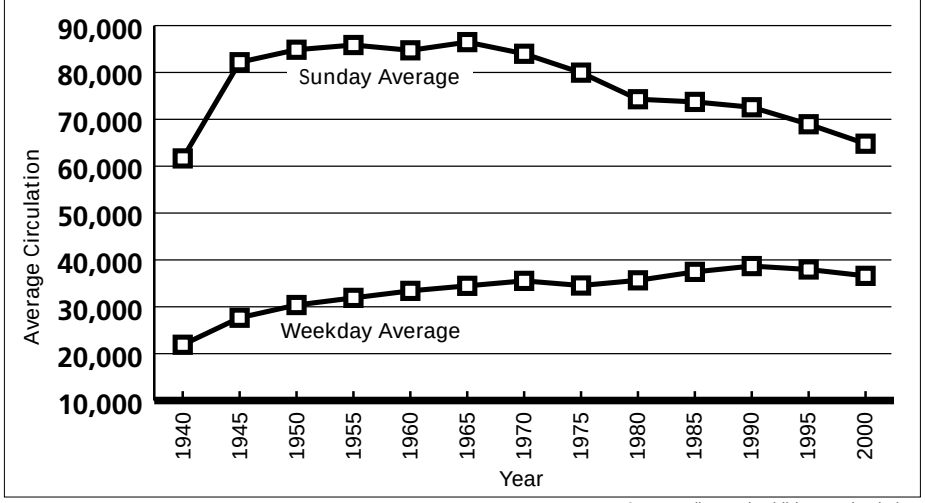
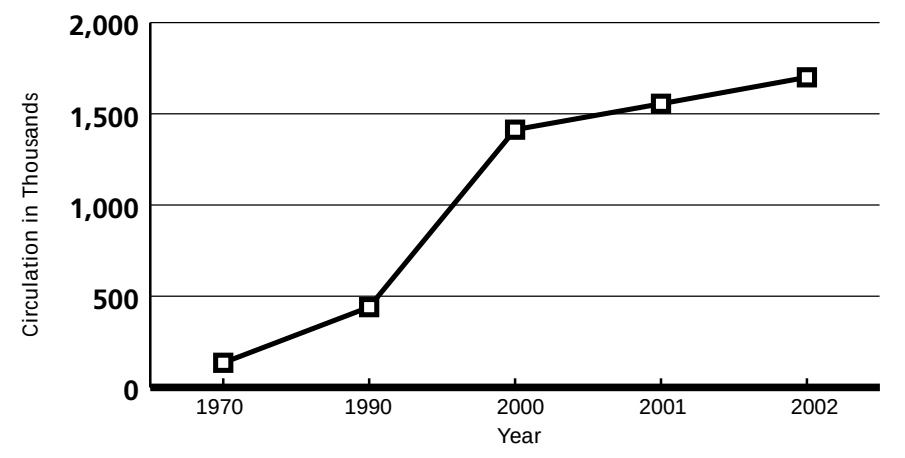
Average Circulation of U.S. Daily Newspapers



Source: Editor and Publisher Yearbook data

Spanish-Language U.S. Daily Newspaper Circulation



Source: Kirk Whisler/WPR

Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL REFORMERS

by Joseph L. Bast & Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D.

Joseph Bast and Herb Walberg, president and chairman, respectively, of The Heartland Institute, make the case for parental choice in education by explaining and defending capitalism. *Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!* is the first effort to join these two subjects in one book since Milton Friedman proposed vouchers in *Capitalism and Freedom* in 1962.

Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!
96 pages; $4.50

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or visit Heartland's online store at **http://www.heartland.org**.

Newspapers

Continued from page 1

the Project for Excellence in Journalism, indicated the immediate prospects for newspapers, as well as televised network news, are not bright.

Circulation of English-language papers in the United States has declined 11 percent since 1990. The share of the U.S. population that reads newspapers has been shrinking for more than two generations, but population growth once masked the trend. Now circulation is decreasing in absolute terms.

The inaugural report, done by a research affiliate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and financed by the Pew Charitable Trusts, attempted a comprehensive look at all forms of news media. While traditional newspapers are losing readership, nontraditional ethnic, alternative, and online outlets are enjoying brisk growth.

Spanish-language newspapers, in particular, have experienced phenomenal gains since 1990, with circulation tripling to 1.7 million papers a day. Bilingual education programs, which often keep immigrant children immersed in their native language instead of rapidly teaching them English, could be affecting this trend, although the report did not explore that angle.

The portion of the massive report devoted to newspapers offered this observation about the post-1990 circulation decline for English-language papers:

"It became clearer that the young, the next generation of likely readers, were failing to develop a newspaper reading habit. The lack of immigrant readers and the middle class also became more pressing as those populations grew and ... several mainstream newspaper companies are now pursuing the Spanish-language market in particular.

"What's more, some data now suggest that people who began reading newspapers in recent years—including young people—have stopped. Newspapers are now losing readers across age and demographic groups."

One conclusion possible from the mass of data presented in the report is that increases in the numbers of college graduates may not automatically translate into increased newspaper readership. It remains true that the more formal education people have the more likely they are to read a newspaper; however, in the past four years, readership has fallen at a faster rate for those with four-year college degrees than among those with only high-school diplomas.

Weekday readership has fallen 4 percentage points in the past four years among college graduates (from 63 to 59 percent), while Sunday readership among this group has dipped 7 points (from 76 to 69 percent). During the same period, weekday readership among high school graduates has declined 3 percentage points (54 to 51 percent), while Sunday readership has gone down 4 points (from 64 to 60 percent).

Not all the news for newspapers is bleak. The financial picture, bolstered in part by cutbacks in news staff, remains reasonably strong. Revenues and profits grew in the 1990s even as circulation was falling.

"The surviving newspapers in town have remained the one place where advertisers can reach the most people with a single ad buy. The demographics are also attractive. If you want to reach opinion and business leaders and the most affluent people in a town, newspapers are the way to go," the report noted.

In addition, the report continued, newspapers usually remain the institution in a community with the largest newsgathering capacity, the broadest range of coverage, and the greatest number of daily stories. "Newspapers, in other words, are still the biggest watchdog in town."

A survey done separately by *USA Weekend* magazine, in cooperation with two newspaper associations, found strong majorities of American teens still find the newspaper relevant to their lives and expect to be reading a newspaper in their adult years. A whopping 95 percent considered newspapers somewhat or very important for an informed citizenry and democracy.

"Spanish-language newspapers ... have experienced phenomenal gains since 1990, with circulation tripling to 1.7 million papers a day."

Nevertheless, the "State of the News Media" report concluded that while financial strategies of the past two decades yielded dividends for newspaper companies, they may only have delayed a confrontation with basic problems. While it was making money, the industry invested relatively little in training, research, and development, or in long-range projects to attract lost or "emerging" groups of readers.

"Now the industry faces an important question. Given their history and their relative strengths, do newspapers believe that if they invest in creating new content and even new kinds of newspapers they can attract new readers? Or is this a mature and declining industry where investing in those things would be throwing money away?"

Another question could be: If schools don't produce proficient and motivated readers, how can newspapers expect to find new readers?

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is **Holland@lexingtoninstitute.org**.

INTERNET INFO

The Project for Excellence in Journalism's report, "The State of the News Media 2004," is available online at **http://www.journalism.org**.

The results of *USA Weekend's* "17th Annual Teen Survey" are available online at **http://www.usaweekend.com/classroom/survey/teen_survey2004_results.html**.

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JUST THE FACTS: ILLITERACY

by George A. Clowes

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports student achievement in terms of four levels: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The last two categories are usually combined into "Proficient or Above."

A "Proficient" student is one who can understand challenging subject matter and apply it to real-world situations, a level NAEP expects all students to be capable of reaching. A "Basic" student is one who has only a partial mastery of the skills and knowledge required for proficient work. Although not defined by NAEP, a "Below Basic" student would be one who has not even a partial mastery of the skills and knowledge required for proficient work—in other words, an illiterate.

The eight charts on this page show the striking extent and magnitude of "Below Basic" illiteracy as reported last December in NAEP's 2003 Trial Urban Assessment for 8th-grade reading achievement in public schools. The base reference chart is Figure 2, which shows the percentage of students achieving at "Below Basic," "Basic," and "Proficient or Above" for the nation as a whole, for 10 of the nations's largest urban school districts, and for a composite urban district. The 12 reporting units are ranked in ascending order of the overall percentage of students at "Below Basic."

Figure 1 shows 4th-grade reading achievement and, by comparison with Figure 2, demonstrates there is little overall change in the percentage of "Proficient" readers between 4th- and 8th-grades. Figures 3 through 8 show the breakout of reading achievement by whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and by eligibility for free/reduced price school lunch.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

INTERNET INFO

Details of the National Assessment of Educational Progress's 2003 Trial Urban District Assessment of Reading are available online at **http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/results2003/districtresults.asp**.

FIG. 1 — 4TH GRADE READING - ALL STUDENTS

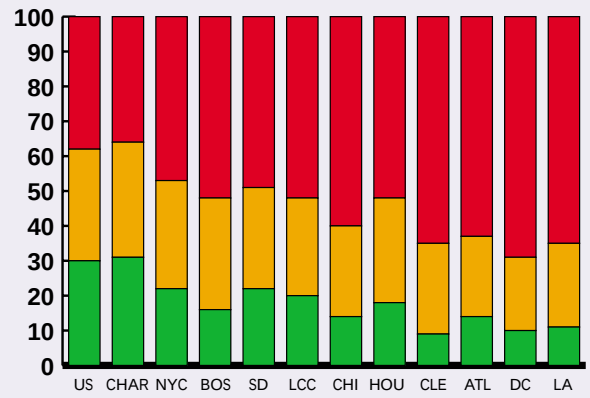
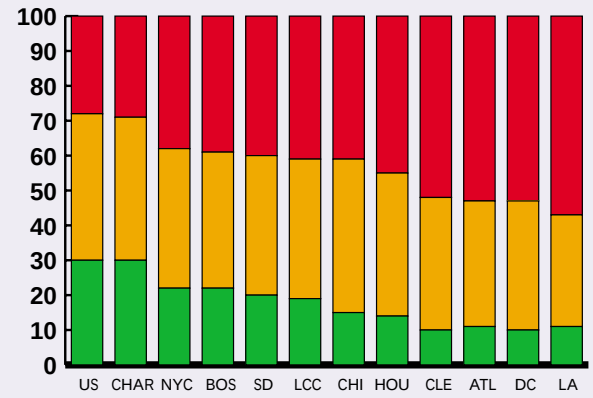


FIG. 2 — 8TH GRADE READING - ALL STUDENTS



KEY

US	United States (Public)
CHAR	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
NYC	New York City Public Schools
BOS	Boston School District
SD	San Diego City Unified School District
LCC	Large Central City Schools (Public)
CHI	City of Chicago School District 299
HOU	Houston Independent School District
CLE	Cleveland Municipal School District
ATL	Atlanta City
DC	District of Columbia Public Schools
LA	Los Angeles Unified School District

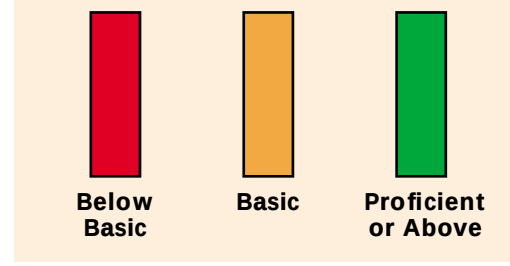


FIG. 3 — 8TH GRADE READING - BLACK STUDENTS

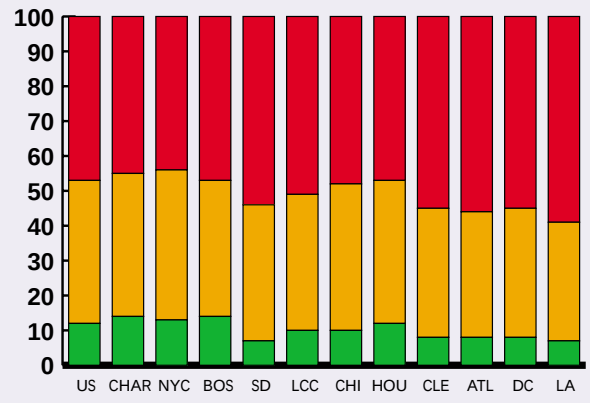


FIG. 4 — 8TH GRADE READING - WHITE STUDENTS

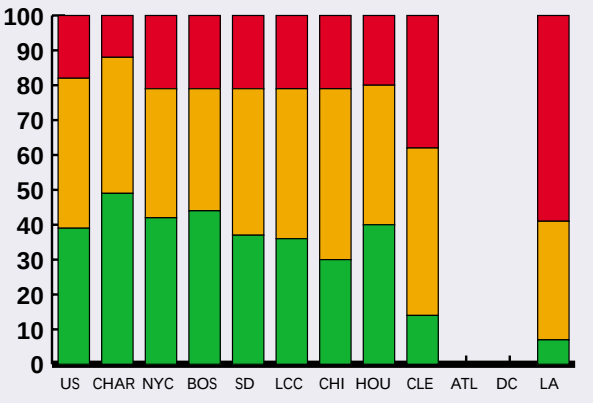


FIG. 5 — 8TH GRADE READING - HISPANIC STUDENTS

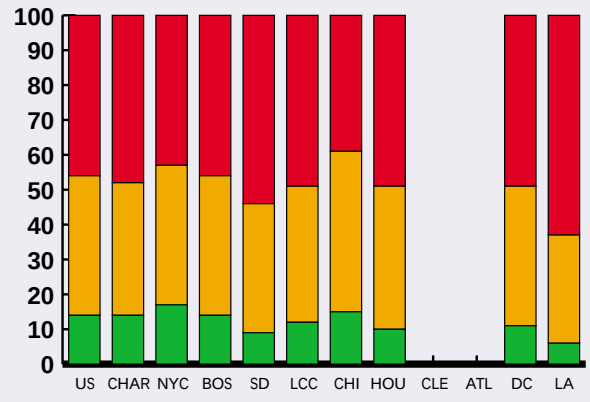


FIG. 6 — 8TH GRADE READING - ASIAN / PACIFIC ISLANDER

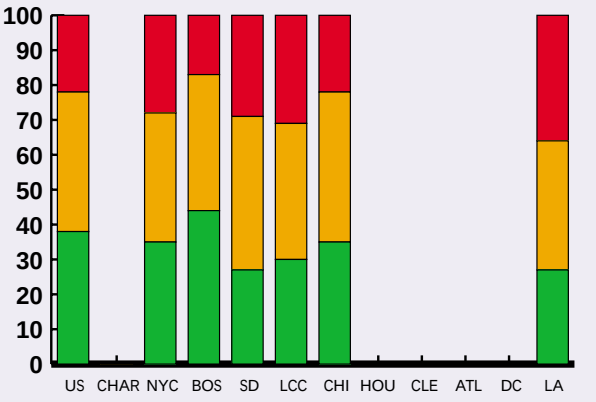


FIG. 7 — 8TH GRADE READING - ELIGIBLE FOR FREE LUNCH

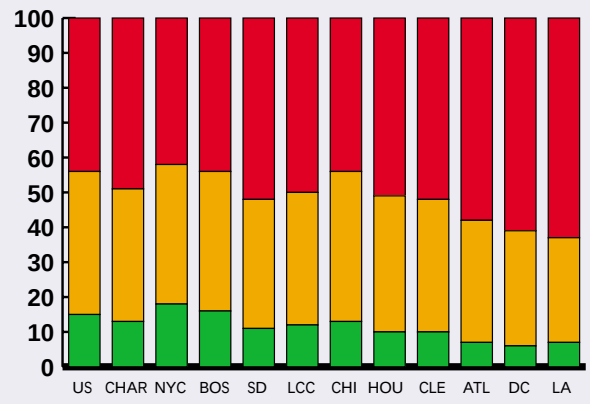
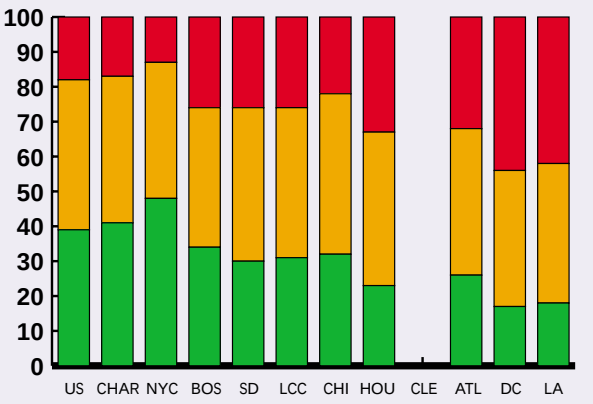


FIG. 8 — 8TH GRADE READING - NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FREE LUNCH



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